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COMMONWEAL

LAITY AND THE LIFE OF FAITH

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The prayers of an engineer

Nancy M. Haegel

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THOMAS SWICK on Thomas Keneally's travels
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KEVIN DOYLE on who buys guns

RELIGIOUS BOOKNOTES: Lawrence S. Cunningham

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CORRESPONDENCE

No sauce for the gender

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: I am deeply hurt after reading about the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on women. I want to tell them that if God has shown them through their great hermeneutical insights that people of my sex were not meant to aspire to the priesthood, I can't see why the funds I earn in a nonsexist environment should be given to them. I'm going to help the nuns.

JACQUELINE LUDORF

Private means private

West Roxbury, Mass.

To the Editors: Regarding Quentin L. Quade's "Prochoice on Schools" [April 10], I've always felt that if tax revenues are available for education, they should be spent on the public schools. If parents prefer a private school education, Catholic or otherwise, for their children, fine. But they should not expect others to pay for it as long as a public school system exists.

The rationale that private schools take a substantial financial load off the taxpaying public and therefore deserve financial support just doesn't wash. No one is forced to go to private schools. The public schools are open to all. The only exception I would make to the use of public funds for private education is to help poor children attend private schools, if that is their choice. Perhaps a means test would be necessary. As for across-the-board vouchers or similar financial aid regardless of income—no!

There are those who advocate such financial aid because public school systems don't measure up. That is an excellent argument for making more funds available for public schools, rather than diluting whatever tax revenues are available for education.

By the way, whatever happened to us that we can no longer adequately support our Catholic schools? We managed to have a thriving parochial school system during the depths of the depression, when people had next to nothing. And we did it without picking other people's pockets.

JOSEPH L. WILKINSON

Kennedy on school aid

St. Louis, Mo.

To the Editors: Professor Quentin L. Quade's "Prochoice on Schools" [April 10] is as far off the mark as one can get. Roman Catholic schools were started because it was thought that Catholic students were discriminated against in public schools. The staffing of these private schools was based upon the unlimited supply of religious teachers. That is no longer the case. Thus, only the affluent parishes can afford parochial schools. Voucher systems are thinly disguised tax supports.

In his address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association on September 12, 1960, then presidential candidate John F. Kennedy said, "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute—where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote—where no church or *church school* is granted *public funds* or political preference—and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him, or the people who might elect him." (Emphasis is mine.)

John F. Kennedy said it all!

JAMES B. FINN

The author replies:

The first paragraph of James Finn's letter is essentially correct until its last sentence, which is both a *non sequitur* and erroneous. Voucher systems are not "thinly disguised tax supports." They are simple, straightforward redirection of tax dollars from monopoly finance distribution via public schools to distribution via parental choice.

John F. Kennedy's Houston description of the relation of religion and politics was one of the great misunderstandings of contemporary politics. He simply had, or at least showed, no realization that in a democracy religion enters the political arena via the believer-as-citizen, not via a church hierarchy. For that believer-as-citizen, religion may be a source of primary political values, but those values are as legitimate as any other values from any source. By failing to distinguish between church and believer, Kennedy miscast the religion-politics issue, and ushered in the remarkably silly "personally opposed, but..." category so much in vogue today.

Applied to the question of education financing, what this means is as follows: tax dollars provided to parents to purchase education where they deem appropriate is unrelated to the "establishment of a church."

Joseph Wilkinson's letter is a nearly perfect illustration of one of the main confusions besetting contemporary educational policy. He effectively equates the end—good education—with one of many means: state-owned public schools. They are obviously different things, and, indeed, one can say those public schools are suffering in part because they have achieved the status of end for such people as Mr.

(Continued on page 29)

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, Ohio 44691. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional offices. Copyright © 1992 Commonweal Foundation. Single Copy, $2. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $36; Canada, $39; foreign, $41. Special two-year rate: U.S., $62; Canada, $66; foreign, $72. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Illustrations: Cover design, p. 24, Antonucci; p. 6, Baloo, Rothco; pp. 9, 27, Charlot; p. 14, Paul Valerry; p. 16, New Catholic Encyclopedia; p. 19, Linden, Rothco; p. 21, Shelton Bryant; p. 26, Ross Rothco.

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COMMONWEAL

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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly, except monthly Christmas, New Year's and July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038. Telephone: (212) 732-0800. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, Me. 04106 (207) 799-4387. classified advertising correspondence to 15 Dutch St. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Commonweal, 15 Dutch St. New York, N.Y. 10038.

What's the rush?

If Horace was correct that the source of justice is the fear of injustice, then American justice is in trouble. When he first refused to commute the death sentence of Robert Keith Coleman last month, Virginia's Governor L. Douglas Wilder made two revealing observations. First, the new evidence presented by Coleman's lawyers did not "prove actual innocence"; second, to delay Coleman's execution "wouldn't be fair to other persons who did not have the same degree of media campaign."

For sure, Coleman had more than his fifteen minutes of prime time, and the governor eventually went to unusual lengths to insure Coleman fairness. Still, since when does public concern about a possible injustice invalidate an individual's claim to a judicial hearing? And since when, to use the governor's awkward and misleading statement, does a prisoner on death row have to "prove" his innocence before a governor must consider commuting or delaying a sentence? In the United States, plausible doubt has usually been sufficient reason to prompt reconsideration in capital cases. If it no longer is, we need to ask why.

Certainly there is national frustration over both high crime rates and the glacial speed with which justice is carried out. A skillfully managed conservative agenda has turned anger over use of court delays into a demand for swifter, if not surer, justice. Some of the most prominent exponents of this view, in fact, now constitute the majority on the Rehnquist Court.

Citizens are fed up, and rightfully so, with the effects of violence. With 20,000 murders a year, our homicide rate is by far the highest in the industrialized world: 8.4 per 100,000, compared to Germany's 4.2 or Japan's 1.2. There are now almost 2,500 prisoners on death row in the thirty-six states that allow execution. To expedite sentencing and punishment, the Rehnquist Court has launched a concerted effort to limit delays and restrict the access of state prisoners to review by federal courts.

The question whether capital punishment is itself unconstitutional was settled in 1976 and reaffirmed by the Rehnquist Court in 1987. But since that time, the Court's decisions have consistently limited the right of prisoners to habeas corpus. Under a 1867 federal act, state prisoners can file a petition for a writ of "habeas corpus" in federal court when they believe that they are being held unconstitutionally, or that their rights have been abridged by the state. The American assumption that an innocent person will eventually be spared is based, in part, on the availability of such reviews.

In real life, lawyers have sometimes used habeas corpus appeals as a delaying tactic in an already protracted judicial process. But despite the occasional frivolous appeal—what Chief Justice Rehnquist calls too many bites at the apple—federal judges have found constitutional errors (which may not be the same thing as innocence) in more than 40 percent of the death-penalty cases they have reviewed over the

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last sixteen years. Thus it is wise to consider the poet Yevtushenko's reminder: Justice is like a train that's nearly always late.

Habeas corpus is an important safety net for those who have no other recourse, particularly indigent prisoners represented at trial by inadequate counsel. In his Virginia appeal, Roger Coleman was disqualified from entering new evidence after lawyer newly appointed to his case failed by one day to meet a state deadline for filing. That Coleman may have been executed prematurely, or at all, because of inadequate representation is something more than his tough luck. It suggests that the system has failed to protect justice and that efficiency—or worse, even vengefulness—have become the driving force on the Supreme Court and in the administration of justice in general.

Frustration with unnecessary delays must be dealt with, but frustration alone, not to mention judicial vindictiveness, can never validate a rush to execution. In this regard, the highest court in the land is currently operating like a locomotive in a downhill plunge. Last month in *Keeney* v. *Tamayo-Reyes*, the Supreme Court ruled that federal courts are no longer obliged to hear appeals if the evidence presented has not been first aired in state courts.

Justice Byron White wrote for the 5-4 majority that "it is hardly a good use of scarce judicial resources to duplicate fact-finding in federal court merely because a petitioner has negligently failed to take advantage of opportunities in state-court proceedings." But how can fact-finding be redundant if, through inadequate counsel, important evidence had not yet even been presented? Under White's ruling, for such new evidence to be heard by a federal court the petitioner will first have to show "cause" as to why the evidence was not entered in the state procedure. According to Anthony Lewis (*New York Times*, May 7), to prove "cause" in such cases is so daunting that "practically no prisoner will ever be able to meet the test."

The Court's ruling in *Reyes*, however, went even further. It also overturned a 1966 federal statute that insured state prisoners the right to a federal hearing unless they had *deliberately* bypassed the state court. In so doing, the Court was legislating from the bench, an abuse of its power. For it is the responsibility of Congress to rewrite habeas corpus legislation, and it alone has the right to do so.

Consider another instance of the Court's rush to judgment, the case of Robert Alton Harris, executed in the California gas chamber in April. At the time, the Supreme Court ordered all lower courts to refrain from issuing further stays of execution. Judge John T. Noonan of the U.S. Court of Appeals in San Francisco publicly questioned this directive to deny further review. Before the execution, the Ninth Circuit Court, on which Noonan sits, had been asked to consider whether the use of cyanide gas constituted "cruel and unusual" punishment. (That it eventually took over ten minutes for Harris to die underscored the reasonableness of Noonan's query.) Yet as Judge Noonan later wrote (*New York Times*, April 27), in short-circuiting his court's jurisdiction, the Rehnquist Court forced it to commit what Chief Justice John Marshall once called "treason to the Constitution": a federal court's failure to exercise its jurisdiction in a case properly brought before it.

In the wake of the mounting number of executions in this country, of the injudicious activism of the Rehnquist Court, and of Noonan's objection, it is not too soon to ask why the Chief Justice is so anxious to "get on with it"? Justice, let us remember, is like a train that's nearly always late.

AN EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

'KENNEDY CALLING'

CHURCH, STATE & SCHOOLS

Without invitation, I want to butt into the argument going on in these precincts over the idea of granting vouchers or tax credits to help parents pay children's tuition in private schools, specifically including Catholic parochial schools. (See "Prochoice on Schools," by Quentin L. Quade, April 10, and the Correspondence section in this issue.)

As so often happens with scribblers of a certain age, it is memory that moves me to intrude. In his letter opposing vouchers, James Finn quotes from a famous speech by Senator John F. Kennedy in which he directly addressed the "Catholic issue" in his 1960 campaign for the presidency, in part by making it clear that if he became president he would oppose allotting any tax money to Catholic schools. Earlier, I had had a go-around with Senator Kennedy on this point which persuaded me that Kennedy didn't "say it all."

Before he became a declared candidate for the Democratic nomination, Kennedy tested the waters through an interview with *Look* magazine—published, I think, in 1959—in which he sounded some of the themes of his later campaign, among them his stance opposing "federal aid to parochial schools." In response, I wrote a signed column for the diocesan paper of which I was then editor, taking issue with the senator on the aid question and other points; as a courtesy, a copy was sent by special delivery to his office in Washington at the same time (2:00 A.M.) that copy for the whole issue was mailed to our printers in a distant state.

Later that morning, thanks to a speedy delivery by the United States Post Office, I was wakened with the news that Senator Kennedy was calling, and that he was angry. I went groggily to the phone. What was I trying to do? Hadn't I read the Constitution? Didn't I know about the decisions of the Supreme Court on church-state separation, on aid to religious schools?

Then, as now, I did not make a habit of conducting long-distance altercations with United States senators, especially before breakfast; proof positive, in my assessment, that my reply came from a Source higher than my head. I said that the Constitution means, in practice, what the current Supreme

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Court says it means; if the Court's decision in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* still prevailed, racially segregated schooling would still be constitutionally protected. So the real issue, I said, was not the current state of the law; it was rather a question of justice. I don't recall for sure how I argued the point at the time, or how Kennedy replied; below I'll indicate how I see it now.

The end of the conversation was not the end of the incident. At the office we told the printers to pull the column and insert something else in its place, but to keep the column in type. We then composed and sent a telegram offering to kill the column altogether if Senator Kennedy would answer a set of questions aimed at clarifying the stands he took in the *Look* interview. I don't remember the questions; I do recall that the telegram cost $45, an unheard-of expense at the time. He never answered. Members of his staff showed up at the offices of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (now the United States Catholic Conference) asking questions about me, my paper, and my bishop. Said bishop received an irate phone call from a prince of the church with an accent even more Bostonian than Kennedy's. The bishop—it was John P. Cody, later himself a prince—asked the staff for an explanation; having heard it, he said we should proceed as we thought best.

So, in the next issue, we ran the column, the text of the telegram, and an explanatory story. But we buried all this material well inside the paper and did nothing to call attention to it; we were pleased that neither the Catholic news service nor any of the wire services picked up the story. In our view, we had done our job. We understood Kennedy's anxiety; he was certain to get clobbered by anti-Catholic forces in the campaign and hoped not to be sabotaged from his own corner. I thought the principle at stake in the aid-to-schools issue was important, but that the issue itself wasn't the most significant facing the country; besides which, it was obvious that no Catholic could win the White House if he campaigned for tax aid to "sectarian" schools. Unfair? Of course; as Kennedy said later, in another context, life isn't fair.

So what *is* the principle at stake? The state has a compelling interest in fostering an educated citizenry; therefore it can legitimately make schooling compulsory, levy taxes to pay for it, set reasonable standards for the performance of schools. But parents have a prior and overriding interest in determining, within standards set by the state, what *kind* of education their children receive; therefore they have a right to choose schools for their children that impart religious values and doctrines while also educating their students in geometry, physics, languages, history, and how to shoot baskets. That parental right is seriously abridged when parents who choose private schools, including religious schools, are denied any share in tax funds earmarked for education. Provided the schools of their choice adequately fulfill the public purpose, tax aid to them—whether through vouchers or tax credits or any other device—does not violate the establishment clause of the First Amendment but rather enables fulfillment of its parallel clause guaranteeing the free exercise of religion. That's how it works in a number of Western nations that are at least as democratic and as secular as the U.S.

On principle, then, I'm in agreement, so far, with Professor Quade. In politics, however, principles collide. Is it a good idea, for Catholics and the country, to make getting vouchers into law a Catholic crusade? Maybe yes, maybe no. In some respects the timing is better than it was in 1960; the "Catholic issue" generates not a roar but a rumble. But in many places the public schools are in a parlous state, so that the idea of "diverting" even a slice of public money to private schools would frighten many a voter, including even those who recognize that nothing in the Constitution sacralizes the public school system. The contention that public schools would be improved by competition from strengthened religious schools appeals to an American dogma, but it's still open to debate. And this coin has another side; arguably, Catholic schools would be *weakened* by state support; parents who sacrifice to support them are parents who care about education. The one "compromise" I think unacceptable is the notion of funding parental choices of private schools unless the schools of their choice are religious. The present situation is unfair; the alleged compromise would be too unfair to live with.

ROBERT G. HOYT

THE BNL SCANDAL

ARMING SADDAM HUSSEIN

A WASHINGTON COVER-UP?

Just as the 1992 presidential campaign really begins, the Bush administration finds itself faced with a major scandal, what the House Banking Committee calls "the *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro* affair." For more than five years, huge amounts of taxpayers' money were misappropriated to help arm Saddam Hussein, and serious questions have arisen concerning the possible involvement of the Bush administration itself.

The *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro* (BNL) is Italy's largest bank in deposits, 96 percent owned by the Italian government, and for the last decade it has maintained a Georgia branch in Atlanta's fashionable Peachtree Center. From 1983 to 1989, BNL Atlanta was the U.S. financial hub for Saddam Hussein's international arms procurement network. This single, obscure BNL branch funneled vast amounts of undisclosed loans to Baghdad's military-industrial complex, where the money was used to produce chemical weapons, missiles, munitions, and components for atomic bombs. The illicit cash flow from Georgia was staggering: $3 billion of unauthorized loans to the Central Bank of Iraq and to the Rafidain Bank of Iraq; $1.8 billion secretly raised on world money markets; and $1.8 billion in U.S. government agricultural loans, many of which were ultimately transformed into weapons purchases—a total of more than $6 billion. When the covert money operation collapsed, U.S. taxpayers were left with a bill of approximately $400 million because of unpaid food loans.

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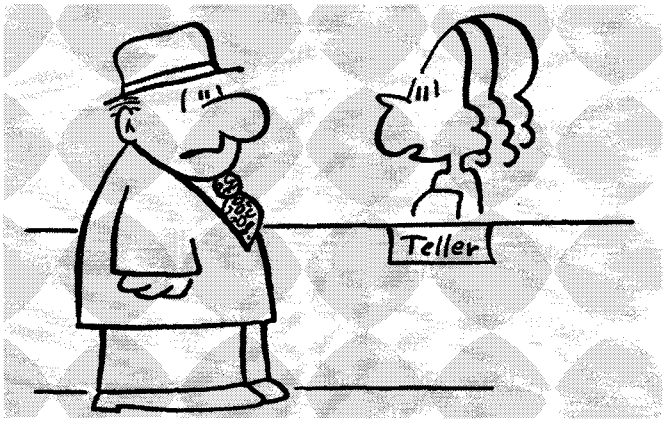

"I'm terribly sorry, sir, but we loaned all your money to a very fast-talking politician from Iraq."

The true scandal, however, concerns much more than money. A growing and imposing body of evidence in the *Congressional Record*, and in major newspapers (among them the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*), indicates that U.S. government officials must have known about the secret BNL Atlanta activity while it was taking place.

During the 1980s the Reagan and Bush administrations adopted the "Iraq tilt" to favor Baghdad against Tehran. There were many warnings about the policy's consequences from government employees in the CIA, the Pentagon, the Customs Service, as well as in the Departments of Energy, Commerce, and Agriculture. Furthermore, on a number of occasions, diligent bureaucrats uncovered and prevented transactions which pointed at BNL Atlanta.

According to testimony before the House Banking Committee by W. Seth Carus of Washington's Institute for Near East Policy, in February 1984 U.S. Customs officials intercepted a shipment of potassium fluoride by the Al Haddad Brothers Trading Co. of Nashville, Tennessee. Interception took place because the chemical can be useful in the production of nerve agents. This company was involved in grain shipments to the Iraqi regime, and was the beneficiary of BNL Atlanta loans to Iraq. The 1984 intercept linked Al Haddad with possible chemical weapons production in Iraq (Baghdad first used chemical weapons against Iranians in 1983). But Al Haddad was also connected with BNL Atlanta, which from 1983 on handled more than 40 percent of the U.S. food loans channeled to Iraq through the Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

If Customs people knew enough to link agricultural exports with Iraqi production of weapons of mass destruction in 1984, why wasn't the money spout at BNL Atlanta immediately investigated?

Some years later, in 1988, Mr. Jerry Kowalsky, an executive at CSI Technologies, a California producer of custom-designed electronic capacitors, received a fax request from Europe for what he recognized to be a nuclear warhead trigger circuit. The commercial demand came in September 1988 from Iraq's principal military procurement agent in Europe, Euromac of the United Kingdom. As he subsequently told the House Banking Committee, Kowalsky *immediately* informed the U.S. Customs Service and the CIA, an action which led eighteen months later to a sting operation in London that prevented the nuclear circuit from reaching Baghdad. But Euromac, U.K. and Euromac of Italy both did business with BNL Atlanta. Since the CIA knew about the suspicious activities of Euromac in September 1988, why wasn't the telex trail followed straight to BNL Atlanta? A White House aide in the late 1980s, Norm Bailey, ran a money-tracking computer analysis of BNL using National Security Agency intercepts, and he told the *Financial Times* (May 3, 1991) what conclusion he reached about the U.S. administration's knowledge of BNL Atlanta-Baghdad telex traffic: "The only explanation I can think of is that the authorities knew all about it and approved it. They were using this as a channel for the financing of certain activities."

As has been reported by the *New York Times* (April 20, 1992), in 1989 the head of the Energy Department's Office of Classification and Technology Policy, A. Bryan Siebert, Jr., found out about Euromac's attempt to buy a nuclear circuit for a bomb from CSI Technologies. Siebert, an expert on the proliferation of nuclear weaponry, knew that the Iraqis had been purchasing uranium-enriched centrifuges in Europe, and he was convinced Baghdad had embarked on a crash program to develop an atomic bomb. He and three colleagues wrote a memo in April 1989, arguing for stricter export controls in Europe and the U.S., a plan they hoped would go forward to the secretary of state and the National Security Council. The memo went nowhere, according to Siebert's boss, because the intelligence section within the Energy Department vetoed it.

From 1983 to 1987, BNL Atlanta brokered CCC loans for food shipments sent from the U.S. to Iraq. At the same time, BNL Atlanta had contacts with East European firms which, it is believed, smuggled weapons into Iraq in exchange for the U.S. food. Beginning in 1987, however, the Atlanta operation became much bigger, financing British, German, and U.S. companies, among others, for the most specialized military contracts: quartz crystals for radar, a satellite tracking system, rocket components, software for missile and bomb production, chemical precursors for the production of nerve gas.

The Atlanta branch kept a secret set of books to record these loans, and the manager who ran the operation, along with a handful of colleagues, was a young man who held dual French-American citizenship, Christopher Drogoul. The contracts for military goods sent to Iraq, which were paid for by these loans, went through Iraq's Ministry of Industrial and Military Production, and were coordinated by Dr. Safa Haji al-Habobi. Al-Habobi was simultaneously director general of the Al Nassr weapons complex in Iraq, and the man in charge of Baghdad's front companies in Britain, which included Euromac and a holding called Matrix Churchill with a subsidiary in Solon, Ohio.

In July 1989, two American employees of BNL Atlanta went to U.S. authorities to tell about what they had observed at the branch. On August 4, 1989, officials from the FBI and the Federal Reserve Board raided BNL Atlanta. Although local prosecutors were ready within weeks to bring charges against Drogoul and others, then Attorney General Dick Thornburgh took a fur-

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ther sixteen months, until February 1991, to file the indictment. People who worked on the case in Atlanta have subsequently said that the Justice Department, the Federal Reserve, and the State Department all delayed the crackdown on BNL Atlanta until immediately after the end of Desert Storm. When the chairman of the House Banking Committee, Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) wanted to press forward with the House investigation of BNL Atlanta, Thornburgh attempted to stop him, warning him in a letter dated September 26, 1990, that "this is a sensitive case with national security concerns."

When Thornburgh finally did hand down his indictment, he attempted to portray the BNL affair as merely "an international white-collar scam," in which the Atlanta bank had simply been "a victim of this criminal enterprise rather than a participant." But, according to Milan's *Corriere della sera* (April 23, 1992), a just released special report by a commission of the Italian Senate says that Drogoul had direct and unusual access to the director general of BNL in Rome; that BNL was responsible for what took place in Atlanta; and that the gradual development of BNL Atlanta as a finance center for Iraq fit into a plan of "some circles in the American political-military-industrial complex."

Drogoul's trial is scheduled to begin this month in Atlanta, but Drogoul and two other defendants, who have already pleaded guilty, insist that both BNL Rome and the U.S. government knew about their activities. Congressman Gonzalez has stated that "several" BNL officials told him the CIA was involved in the concession of loans to Iraq. In an interview quoted by *Corriere della sera*, Drogoul declared that "the governments in Rome and Washington knew perfectly well what was going on." He noted that before 1989 Matrix Churchill exported from the U.S. to Iraq with State and Commerce Department approval: "It is ridiculous to think that American intelligence did not know what Safa Habobi was doing in the United States, when he was simultaneously the president of Matrix Churchill and the main Iraqi in charge of military-industrial supplies."

On October 13, 1989—shortly after the August raid on BNL Atlanta—lawyers and officials of the CCC met in the Agriculture Department. They discussed the fact that U.S. food aid to Iraq had been diverted in order for Baghdad to purchase weapons, even for "sensitive nuclear technologies" and "nuclear-related equipment." Apparently the discussion did not have any impact outside the department. In October 1989, President George Bush signed National Security Directive 26 committing the U.S. government to "improve and expand our relationship with Iraq."

The BNL Atlanta affair cries out for full congressional investigation, if not for an independent counsel. Congressman Gonzalez has called for both. Complaints from U.S. food exporters about Iraqi demands for kickbacks produced immediate suspicions at Agriculture about the real use of CCC funds; yet the information, apparently, never went outside the department. The Customs Service intercepted, the CIA and Pentagon warned prophetically about Iraq, memos were written; but Washington's embrace of Iraq continued until a war became necessary. Weary as the citizenry is of scandal, the BNL Atlanta affair is a pressing case of the public's need and responsibility to know.

PATRICK BARNARD

Patrick Barnard is a Canadian journalist specializing in international affairs. He has contributed to the Nation *and* Newsday *as well as* Commonweal.

JAPAN IN TRANSLATION

AMBIGUITY & HIERARCHY

WHY AMERICANS DON'T GET IT

Language is something that most of us take for granted. Yet it is the ability to communicate with one another that binds us to our culture and our heritage. The diversity of usage in a language inherently reflects the customs and interests of the society speaking it. As a long-time student of the Japanese language, I have found it to be exceptionally distinctive and rich, defining the Japanese more than any other element of their culture. It is a unique language, not clearly belonging to any family of languages.

Indeed, English and Japanese have such widely different structures, with syntax largely reversed, that smooth and precise simultaneous interpretation is nearly impossible. When Japanese and Americans sit down together, often much is lost in the translation, by estimates a dangerous 20 percent between speaker and interpreter, and another 20 percent between interpreter and listener. Even if interpreted in a literally accurate way, some statements can assume different shades of meaning. Presumably clear comments can become obscure and jokes are often met with blank stares.

Much more so than Americans, the Japanese place great importance on social hierarchy. Where American society stresses equality, the Japanese consider the ranking of individuals both natural and inevitable. This is the result of Japan's long history of hereditary power and aristocratic rule. Individual dignity in Japan is often derived from and inextricably tied to one's relationship to family, school, and workplace. The Japanese are born into a society clearly divided into three categories: *senpai* (one's senior), *kohai* (one's junior), and *doryo* (one's equal). Even among *doryo*, differences such as age, year of entry into an organization, or year of graduation from school contribute to a sense of *senpai* and *kohai*. Not surprisingly, this is reflected in the language.

There are nearly a dozen different terms for "I" or "me," depending on the speaker's sex and social status relative to the person being addressed. In addition to the most common word *Watashi*, are *Watakushi* (polite), *Atashi* (standard, female only), *Washi* (informal, older men only), *Boku* (informal, younger men only), *Ore* (very informal, men only), *Jibun* (military), and *Uchi* (female dialect). Other words that appear primarily in literary works and samurai dramas include *Ware, Wagahai, Onore, Sessha, Temae*, and *Yo*.

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In Japan, it is considered polite to address someone according to his or her specific status appellation, such as *okusan* (the lady of the house) or *kacho* (division chief). This is even true among family members. A brother born before you would usually be called "older brother." When he marries, his wife, even if younger than yourself, would henceforth be addressed as "older sister."

Keigo is a rigidly formal type of Japanese. In many ways it is a distinct language, invoking an entirely different vocabulary. The speaker of *keigo* in essence supplicates himself to the other person. If one were to overhear a conversation between two Japanese men—without seeing their faces—one could quickly determine which of them is the senior, simply by the choice of words. For example, the younger man would ask the other man if he had eaten by saying "*Meshiagari mashita ka*?" But the older man would ask the same question of his junior by saying, "*Tabe mashita ka*?"

The Japanese obsession with the indispensable calling card is related to the importance of status and hierarchy. Such cards enable individuals meeting for the first time to quickly learn one another's affiliation and title, making clear the language appropriate for the occasion.

But for all the emphasis on "ranking-consciousness" in Japanese society, it is often purely symbolic. Seldom can one individual, regardless of status, make important decisions unilaterally without ruffling some feathers. Even when Japanese political leaders like Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa make disparaging remarks about American workers, they are doing so in the belief that they are merely reinforcing obvious and commonly held opinions. That many Japanese were genuinely surprised by the intensity of our anger over such comments is a sign of the inherently insular nature of Japanese society. Throughout its history Japan has been the most geographically and spiritually isolated of the world's major countries. Though no nation is now more dependent on the global flow of trade than Japan, the psychological effects of isolation still linger.

All languages provide some means of vagueness, yet an intentional lack of clarity is more easily accomplished in Japanese than in most European languages. The Japanese believe that decisions should be made by consensus-generating consultations so as to avoid personal confrontation. Points are argued in a loose, circular manner with suggestions and inference, rather than the get-to-the-point way of most Americans. There are no specific barriers in the Japanese language that prevent clear and concise presentation of thought, but the Japanese feel that often they can best convey attitudes and views by means of innuendo and nonverbal communication. This ability to pass on thought without words is known to the Japanese as *ishin-denshin*, literally "what the mind thinks, the heart transmits."

While the Japanese may seek to avoid blatant appearances of animosity, they have obtained economic success as much through toughness in negotiations as through high quality production. American government officials often grumble that their Japanese counterparts make what appear to be clear concessions, only to heavily qualify them at a later date. Japanese negotiators have skillfully used the ambiguity or *aimai* of their language to avoid taking undesirable positions on sticky matters. To the chagrin of their foreign counterparts, the Japanese, when confronted with an unpleasant demand for some action, are likely to say something like "*zensho shimasu*," which roughly translates as, "we will take the appropriate steps to deal with the situation." This has the sound of appearing as though the speaker has the other's interest at heart but in reality it is a vague statement and commits the speaker to nothing.

Although the deftness to utilize the unique intricacies of language may have some usefulness in bilateral negotiations, the inability to react quickly to changes in the international environment handicaps Japan in multilateral forums and betrays a detachment from issues of global concern. The Japanese have clearly mastered the skills necessary to develop and maintain fruitful economic relations. But they have not yet acquired the ability to communicate to the world a greater sense of trust, a belief in a common destiny with the rest of the world that is commensurate with Japan's capacity to make significant contributions toward solving our common problems.

ROBERT J. CARRARO

Robert J. Carraro is a Washington-based writer who lived in Japan for several years.

A FATHER'S IMAGE OF THE PAST

LEGENDS LIVE ON

ALIVE, CRANKY, WARTS & ALL

By mid-high school, our children often rushed past me, shouting back that they would be home later, and it grew harder to recall what our agreement was on curfew or the plans for next weekend. In college, they were catching planes for the coasts, or foreign shores, and it took more elaborate invitations to arrange a dinner together. I admired and envied their enterprise—it was just what I wanted for them—but I started to miss our spells of fun together, our leisurely periods of joint rumination, even eye contact. I wondered: Why am I paying the mortgage if the rooms are empty?

During one such melancholy phase, I started to unpack boxes from several moves and unearthed a hoard of memories. There were cartons of tiny clothes, slightly gray and stiff with mold—hard to imagine how cute they once were—and boxes of unsorted snapshots. The latter were the most powerful stimuli of all. But I found that after an initial rush, the photographs began to pall. They were too much, all of the images becoming frozen and static, and I had to put them aside to remember more: at which house did this happen? And with the process, some mobility and pinkness of cheek came back to the faces in the pictures, reflecting perhaps what I had felt at the time.

It was during this unpacking that I discovered those episodes

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that make up the legends of our family. Now, I'm not some St. Augustine remembering rolling fields of continuous sights and sounds. Great chunks of the past are obscure for me. In fact, the general effect of my recollections is that of a silent movie: more flash and flicker than steady light.

Some memories were simply too massive to digest at a single sitting: births, deaths, wars. I was left staring at the wall. But others, often about seemingly minor events, were what constituted the stuff of family legend. These seemed to stick in the mind like a stubborn sandbur. Picking them out could hurt or excite, but they led to stronger emotions. The character of each individual stood out dramatically in them: alive, cranky, warts and all. These legends tend to be the stories family members recall to one another: "Do you remember the time when...?"

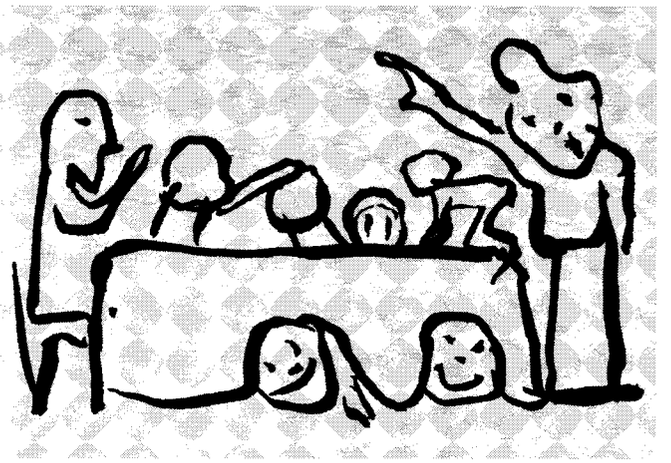
Some of these family legends were of the children when they were small and dependent. My son loved spaghetti and, at age two, almost finished a massive platter when he fell asleep, face down, on the remainder. (There's a photo of his dazed face, smeared with spaghetti sauce.)

Many of my favorite memories are of our children's growing verbal precocity. One of our daughters, at four years old, yelled above the noise of the crowd to a stunt pilot, "Watch your ass!" Our son, at the same age, was given a definition of "infinity" and shuddered, "It's too much, too much." At five years old, the same son took a favorite married babysitter, herself childless, into a room and showed her an anatomical drawing I had given him depicting intercourse and conception. Asked why, he answered, "I had to because she didn't know how to do it."

I have memories of crowds of children rushing across a broad expanse—a field of grass or a hardwood floor—with a crowd of spectators on the sideline. The children looked small and distant at first, and I feared for their shins and necks. But then I would spot one of my kids in the thick of the pack, free and making his or her way in the general throng. And there were the trips to movies, like the gray December day we went to Bergman's *Magic Flute*, were bathed in the warm music and color of the film, and came out of the theater into the magical transformation of the first snow.

Other legends are of practical jokes—less funny or more funny in the retelling?—and of childhood illnesses. Those illnesses were terrifying at the time: weeks of croup and lights burning in the middle of the night. Some were more threatening. One daughter was told she might have cancer and we were overwhelmed. But another doctor said there was nothing wrong and has proven right. These are stories of triumph now. While I cherish my luck that my children are alive, healthy, and bright, nevertheless dark shades were never absent for long.

Some of the best family legends involve trips in a car. By a quirk of fate, there is a breakdown, or we get lost, and only by good luck and determination do we navigate to a safe harbor. Once, in late October, we traveled to a remote summer cabin. We were driving in a newly inherited Thunderbird. The car's power steering and power windows seemed to guarantee an unaccustomed control. It was midnight and we were a mile from the cabin. Suddenly, the engine went dead and all the lights



went out. (A defunct generator, we found out later.) There were no lights in the woods or the fields around us. The spark seemed to have gone out of the car, and perhaps all of Western civilization. My wife and I could do nothing but hike to the cabin, carrying sleeping children and the ice chest. We could see nothing in the blackness. Our feet felt their way, inch by inch, down the macadam and then a dirt road. Even when we groped through the door of the cabin, nothing was visible. But turning on the light switch, we were flooded with the warm, safe light, and amazed to recognize the bedraggled wanderers we were.

There are also the stories that culminate in the mythical meal, a crowd around the table. Thanksgivings and Christmases blur together, but there are other meals as well: the time we boiled five lobsters, or prepared a caldron of fresh corn, or, just as grand, the time we made fresh cheesecake but couldn't wait and ate it still warm.

Do I exaggerate these ordinary stories, and emphasize selected features? Of course I do. I know they are partial, both fragmented and slanted, and every member of the family would probably supply a different list, or surely a different version. They are like edited copy, shaped by the needs of the present. For in real life, we quarreled much of the time, no one was completely satisfied, and everyone wanted more glory. The deep itch to outdo one's sibling was seldom soothed, and my wife and I were not free of such urges ourselves.

Another peculiar warp to these memories was that while I pictured myself as large and independent and my children as small and dependent, over the years the children have grown physically imposing, clever, and gifted with idiosyncratic views. Now, I am lucky to join in their conversation. This is the usual course of the generations, but my family "legends" tend to downplay that. Peter de Vries said: "Who of us is mature [enough] for offspring before offspring arrive? The value of marriage is not that adults produce children, but that children produce adults."

There is no doubt that the bond of family affection can be extolled too much, the web of affection be drawn too tight, chokingly so. "There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give to our children," Hodding Carter has remarked. "One of these is roots; the other, wings."

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Now that our children have moved away and we are left to tend the property, we take solace from two things. One is discerning and sticking to the truth, which includes some unpleasant news (the mortgage, taxes, poor health, creaky knees, further repetitions of overly familiar experiences, etc.). The other is our image of the past, the family legends. We quarreled, it is true, but at times we came together, we connected. We gave each other respect and love, and our family stories stand for that. (All too often we search in vain for community in jobs, schools, clubs—forget about the state—when there is a better chance of finding it in this small group.) These family legends are strong. They catch us in the flesh, in the act. They show that we were true, reliable, and in harmony, at least for a particular, fleeting instant.

Now we bring out these legends after family dinners, after dessert and coffee. But I find I need them even more when we are apart or we have had another quarrel. The daily grind of growing up was the rough ore: tons of dirt and rocks. But these legends are my talismans, smooth rubbing stones I carry, clicking them together for comfort. WILLIAM J. HOUGHTON

William J. Houghton, M.D., is a physician who lives and practices in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

OF SEVERAL MINDS Abigail McCarthy

'OF ALL THE GIN JOINTS'

HEROES WANTED

It was sheer pleasure to see *Casablanca* whole, uninterrupted, and uncut after fifty years. Somehow I had missed seeing it again during the sixties and early seventies when Bogart film-watching was almost a cult on campuses of the colleges attended by my children.

Like everyone else, though, I remembered the marvelously cynical effrontery of Claude Rains's "I am shocked—shocked—to discover that you permit gambling here!"; and, of course, the unabashedly bathetic Bogart line, "Of all the gin joints in all the world, why did she have to walk into mine?"

What I had forgotten was how dewily beautiful the young Ingrid Bergman was, and how uncomplicated and credible was Paul Henreid's patriotism, idealism, and courage as the Czech freedom fighter. While we watched everything seemed once again as clear and clean as it had seemed for most of us during what we thought of as "the good war." It was easy to feel the sting of tears. To be moved again as the crowd in the seedy cabaret drowned the singing of the Nazi officers with the rousing Marseillaise.

At the end, as the credits rolled, and the audience lingered absorbing the effects of a really good movie, I found myself wondering why those college students of twenty-five years ago had liked the film so much. They were for the most part antiwar students, disillusioned by our venture in Vietnam. Many of them had no trust in the government, no belief in the goals set by its leaders.

They had reason for their cynicism. Senate hearings had exposed "the rogue elephant," the CIA, and the callous manipulation of men and small countries by its covert arm. Television had shown them children aflame with burning napalm rained from bombs from our planes and eventually reported the shame of My Lai—horrors resulting from what they were told was a war of liberation in which they should take part.

So, perhaps, they scoffed a bit at Bogart as Rick and what film critic Stanley Kauffmann has called his taciturn nobility. Still, among them were the students of the civil rights movement. Their contemporaries had joined in the sit-ins, had been "freedom riders." Some of them had faced Bull Connors and his men at Selma. Undoubtedly, watching *Casablanca* they felt a yearning for a time and a place for clear-eyed heroism in the cause of liberty. In the midst of their disillusionment over our involvement in Vietnam they could find in *Casablanca* some vestige of belief in cause and country.

As I shook off the spell of the film, I myself thought that it was harder to do that now, after the last decade of greed and corruption in an era when wars are waged and won by technology, when human fighters are so negligible in the march and flight of machines that they are as likely as not to be the victims of "friendly fire"—in such a time there is little room for personal nobility. No more Ricks or Renaults, I thought, going off into the mist to make a last stand against tyranny. And then I shook myself into reality. I was guilty, I realized, of unearned cynicism. I was forgetting to remember and honor a generation of heroes, of men and women who endured (and endure) prison, sometimes torture, to keep alive the thought of freedom.

It is important to remember the Chinese students and workers who rose up in 1989, those who died and those held in prison. A recent news report on student leader Wang Dan quotes a Chinese official as saying "It's not easy to reform his ideology," indicating that, even in prison, Wang Dan is resisting pressures and deprivations we can only imagine. The same is probably true of the two credited with masterminding the protest movement, Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao.

The courageous rise on every continent: often to be beaten down again and sometimes to rise again as martyrs, symbols, and inspiration to new heroes. One can only hope that this will be true of Peru's Maria Elena Moyano who so bravely led the public resistance to the Maoist terrorists known as the Shining Path. She was a smiling and beautiful woman, deputy mayor of Villa el Salvador, a town of shanties and hovels south of Lima. She led her people in a peace march, was dubbed "Mother Courage" by the press, only to be shot and dynamited by a Shining Path execution squad.

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Such are the risks, but the heroes persist. There are those who survived the risks to lead their people all the way to freedom—Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, and, yes, Boris Yeltsin. If he had not mounted that tank at the time of the coup in Russia, what might not have happened?

When historian Eugene Genovese wrote recently that heroes are hard to find and "especially hard to acknowledge in this time of moral decadence" (*The New Republic*, May 11), he was thinking, I am sure, of our own country. Heroes are hard to find but we do have them. There were certainly more than we know during the violence in Los Angeles. We know of Lei Yuille, Terri Barnett, and Titus Murphy—three people of color—who braved the mob to save white truck driver Reginald Denny. We know of Gregory Williams, the black actor who, in the midst of the riots, fended off five angry youths stalking a light-skinned black man and then saved a Japanese-American from being brutally beaten by the rioters and carried him to safety. Williams does not think of himself as a hero, he says (*Washington Post*, May 11). He prefers to think of himself as "the recipient of a gift, a gift to serve another human being."

Yes, we have our heroes, spontaneous heroes. What we do not seem to have are the leaders who evoke heroism and who embody values and a vision worth serving with heroism. We cannot forget that behind Rick and Renault stood a proud, lone, stubborn Frenchman who, with his nation not only defeated but colluding with the enemy, could still call forth the spirit of another France: France as she should be and, as he believed, once was. It takes leaders like De Gaulle—like Walesa, Havel, and Yeltsin—to know the uses of courage. What we need is a leader who can evoke the image of our country not as she is—divided and riven with disunion, with little hope for the future—but as she should be and as we once thought she was: a land of opportunity and equality. We need a leader to summon the courageous to the works of peace. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin Jr.

THE BUSINESS OF BEING PEROT

THE ANTINOMIAN CANDIDATE

It must be the effect of advancing age, but I seem to be getting cranky about nearly everything nowadays. I'm even cranky about Ross Perot running for president.

The Perot candidacy is a good thing if you're looking for entertainment, for it promises to be fun to watch. But it is of doubtful merit if we are looking for signs of health in American society in general and the American political system in particular.

Why do I say that?

Let's begin with the premise that a nation is something more than a giant marketplace where self-interested parties meet to do business with one another; it is also a community; and this community is created and sustained by shared values, rules, meaning, and beliefs—in other words, by a cultural consensus.

Certainly the United States has a cultural consensus. If it did not, the nation would have fallen apart before now. But the consensus, it seems to me, is weaker than it ought to be, and it is tending to grow weaker all the time. The Perot candidacy is a sign of that growing weakness.

Picture a spectrum running from left to right. At one end (let us call it the "material" end of the spectrum), Americans have a high level of agreement relative to the prevailing system of economic production and consumption.

On the production side, no one is advocating communism; no one is calling for a return to an agrarian economy; no one is asking for the restoration of slavery; and hardly anyone (except for some of the friends of Milton Friedman, a notable exception) is seriously asking for government to keep its nose out of business.

On the consumption side, no one is advocating the passage of sumptuary laws, and there are no signs that either monasticism or puritanism is about to revive. Americans generally agree that we ought to spend our money as quickly as possible on such things as housing, food, clothing, automobiles, college educations, vacations, furniture, computers, microwaves, CD players, etc.

At the other end of the spectrum (let us call it the "spiritual" end), we have no consensus on religion, and we have a deteriorating consensus on moral values.

From the beginning, or at least since the adoption of the First Amendment, Americans have agreed to disagree about religion. But the nature of today's agreement-to-disagree is quite different from yesterday's. Until about a century ago, Americans, despite denominational differences and their frequently unchurched status, were overwhelmingly Protestant. The nation wasn't specifically Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, etc., but it was generically Protestant. And when the Catholics and Jews finally came to form a non-Protestant critical mass, this very flexible Protestant consensus expanded and transformed itself, becoming a Judeo-Christian consensus. In other words, this agreement-to-disagree pertained only to the denomination of one's choice. We did not agree that good Americans were free to have no religion at all—to be, for instance, atheists or agnostics.

But things have changed. Secularism has become more respectable, indeed more aggressive, and religion has been forced further and further out of the public realm and into the private. Today's agreement-to-disagree no longer says: "Just as long as you have a religion, we don't care which one it is." Instead it says: "We don't care whether you have a religion or not."

As for moral values: here too the consensus grows thin. The culture of secularism, agnostic with regard to religion, is largely antinomian with regard to morality. Within certain broad and necessary limits, moral values are increasingly con-

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sidered to be matters of pure personal preference, having no objective status.

So we have a strong consensus at the material end of the spectrum and a weak-to-nonexistent consensus at the spiritual end.

In the middle of the spectrum is politics, which resembles the material in some ways and the spiritual in others. It borders the two, forming the bridge between them. It participates in both while having its own distinctive nature.

The trouble with our material consensus is that it is unsuitable for sustaining community. It is terrific for keeping a marketplace in good working condition; and if America were nothing more than a giant market, then our material consensus would be sufficient.

We can't get much help from the other end of the spectrum either. Our spiritual consensus is increasingly unavailable for sustaining community, for the simple reason that this consensus moves more and more in the direction of nonexistence.

This leaves us with no choice but politics. In the absence of a common religion or morality, it is politics, the institutions in the middle of the spectrum, that will have to provide us with the cultural consensus needed to sustain community. Now, in principle there is nothing impossible in this. Politics, after all, has a moral dimension; and though we Americans don't seem to be able to agree on questions of private morality, perhaps we can agree on basic questions of public morality.

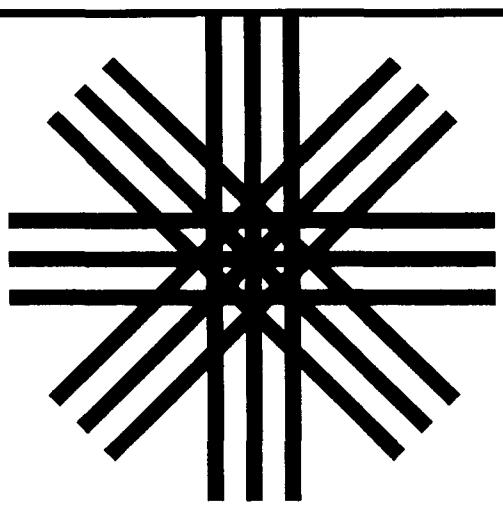
Unfortunately, no neat line can be drawn between private values and public values. The one is a continuation of the other, and antinomianism in one sphere will tend to generate antinomianism in the other. If we have little agreement on private moral values, we will soon have little agreement on public moral values. In such a situation the moral element in politics will inevitably be drained away, leaving only the business element. Politics will exist to serve the marketplace only, not to serve community.

Little wonder people turn away from politics. (We'll be lucky if we have much more than 50 percent turn out to vote this presidential year.) Why bother? Why take it seriously when it deals only with the means of living, not with the ends for which we live—when it deals with nothing more than getting and spending, not with either last things or penultimate things?

And why not elect Ross Perot president? If American politics were about religion and morality as well as business, it might make sense to elect someone like Abraham Lincoln or Woodrow Wilson or one of the two Roosevelts. But if religion is gone and morality going and nothing is left in politics but business, then it makes perfect sense to put a businessperson in charge.

One of the signs that a social problem has become irreversible is that the remedies proposed aggravate the problem instead of relieving it. The Perot candidacy is a case in point. American government isn't working very well at the moment, and there are two main reasons for this: the political parties are too weak, and the influence of outside money is too strong. So what does the Perot candidacy have to offer? The further weakening of parties and the further enhancement of money influence.

No wonder I'm cranky. □



THE GRAYMOOR PRIZE

The Friars of the Atonement announce the third annual Graymoor Prize, to be awarded to the best essay on any aspect of ecumenical or interreligious affairs. The prize is intended to encourage and support new ecumenical and interreligious ideas and perspectives. The award-winning submission, which may take the form of a scholarly or critical essay or a personal narrative, should appeal to the interests of the general educated reader.

Original and unpublished essays of approximately 2,500-4,000 words should be submitted to the editors of COMMONWEAL who will make the final decision following consultation with a panel of experts. The winning essay will receive a prize of $1,000 and will be published in COMMONWEAL. The editors reserve the right not to award the prize.

Deadline: October 1, 1992. Announcement of Prize: December 18, 1992. The prize-winning essay will be published in COMMONWEAL's January 15, 1993, issue. This essay will become the property of the Graymoor Ecumenical Institute. All other essays will be returned to their authors after January 1.

COMMONWEAL 15 Dutch Street New York, New York 10038

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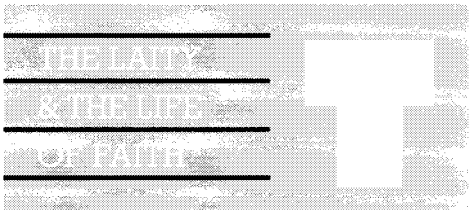
EUREKA MOMENTS

THE PRAYERS OF AN ENGINEER

NANCY M. HAEGEL



The alarm rings at 6 A.M. I mumble a "good morning" to the Lord, kiss my husband, and listen to the radio. Unlike the first two, the latter is generally a useless and depressing exercise—the headlines are bad and the weather in Los Angeles is rarely worthy of discussion. A daily request ("Your will today, Lord, and *please* help") suffices for morning prayer. I'm not a morning person—I don't pray, fill the crockpot, or run 5K before sunrise. I get up and concentrate on getting myself and my family ready and out the door. Ready for "the day." Ready for work.

Work for me consists of teaching, doing research, and serving the university community at UCLA. I arrived in Los Angeles in 1987 after a journey which included stops at Notre Dame and Berkeley and a year as a post-doctoral scientist in German industry. Armed with three degrees in materials science (a field of engineering dealing with the development and characterization of materials) and just enough research experience to make credible the thought of being able to teach, I joined the ranks of the engineering faculty.

Young (I was twenty-seven then), female, and Catholic, I realized that all three were characteristics shared by few of my colleagues on the engineering faculty. The first two were facts of nature—one would change with time, the other they had to live with. But the third was a matter of choice. It wasn't on the résumé, though one could easily read between the lines, but, perhaps even more than the other two, it influenced both the attitudes and the ambitions I brought to my new job.

Within the Catholic community, I'd always thought of myself as a skeptic, a peripheral though "practicing" Catholic. My family had given me a Catholic identity, and, more importantly, an experience of love, the first glimmer of God. Four years at the University of Notre Dame had given me a wonderful opportunity to grow in both that identity and that love, to encounter people whose own lives as Catholics were models for what I hoped for my own. But I look upon my years of graduate school at Berkeley as my confirmation experience as a Catholic. Only when confronted by the denial of belief in others did I begin to see myself as a believer. Only then did I begin to realize that I could interpret my experiences and relationships, my work and my life, only in light of that belief.

Not until Berkeley were there real choices to be made, questions to be answered, commitments to be held. Surrounded by friends who shared neither my faith tradition nor often any other, in a work environment that encouraged a respect for excellence and achievement divorced from any sense of work as vocation or service, I came to appreciate how similar were many of our values and commitments, and yet how different the wellsprings from which they came. A similar environment exists in my work today. Friends and colleagues I respect, and whose respect I desire, think that religious faith is childhood baggage to be discarded, a crutch for the weak or ignorant. Yet my colleagues and friends do, I think, respect me. Respect me and care for me—care enough to wonder and perhaps worry.

So while my work colleagues worry about my mind, my Catholic friends (at least in my imagination) worry about my heart. An engineer of all things, contributor to the rape of the planet, soulless technocrat, one of the dullards of academic life!

In 1987, Commonweal published a series of articles by lay people who described their personal experience of faith in the work place. We received such positive response to the series that we decided to continue it. We have asked each individual: How is your Catholic faith manifest in your daily life and work? How has faith shaped your choices: vocational, financial, ethical; and vice versa? Where do you find spiritual strength and guidance?

Our ninth installment in the series is by Nancy M. Haegel, a professor of material sciences at UCLA.

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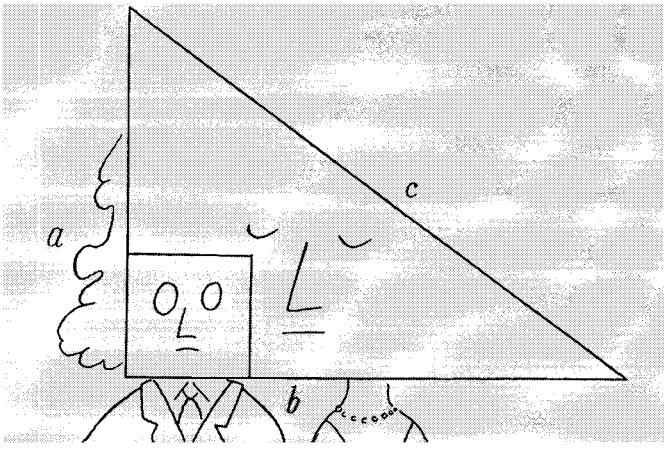
At Notre Dame engineering was considered, at least in some circles I frequented, a major chosen primarily by those who wouldn't and/or couldn't work with people, those who wanted job security and/or money. I was told more than once, in a variety of ways, that I was wasting my talents, selling my soul.

The stereotypes, as always, are unfair, but the underlying question is valid. With one life to live, why engineering? I am an engineer in part, I suppose, because after four years of college and another five of graduate school, I would have been hard pressed to do much else. I continue this work though, in research and teaching, because nothing else I've ever done quite compares to the intellectual challenge, the creative aspects, and the sense of discovery I've found in scientific work. I enjoy teaching, helping other people reach their potential. And I love the "Eureka" moments, seeing students' eyes light up, whether in the classroom or the laboratory, when they make a discovery of their own.

Scientific insight often comes suddenly. The pieces crash into place after weeks, months, sometimes years of effort and confusion. One thinks of the recent work in high temperature superconductors. Theorists and experimentalists had labored for decades to predict and achieve superconductivity, a state of matter characterized by perfect conduction of electrical current and unique magnetic properties in new materials and at temperatures that would allow for routine and inexpensive use in electronics. Suddenly, in 1986, reports of a new superconducting compound from scientists at IBM Zurich sparked worldwide excitement. A few true believers had persevered, worked long and hard, built upon previous knowledge, struck paydirt, and ultimately won the Nobel Prize. Granted, most of us don't do Nobel prize-winning work, but we do share that sense of discovery and breakthrough. That experience, regardless of how small the contribution or esoteric the topic, is the highlight of our work, our careers. For me, sharing those moments with students transforms work and career into service and vocation. On the good days, it's enough.

I do live, though, with a certain ambiguity about the work. Scientists and engineers can look with both pride and dismay at the results of their handiwork, and, for many of us in academic research, the pride and dismay are hopelessly intertwined. Whether our research is fundamental or applied, it ultimately leads to everything from laser surgery to Star Wars, from the tele-phones, -faxes and -visions that make our world smaller to the nuclear weapons that threaten (dare we use the past tense?) to blow it apart.

As human beings, we ate long ago from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One of the lessons then was not that knowledge is evil, but that knowledge alone does not make us gods. Like many people in my profession, I mourn our inability to use our knowledge wisely, humbly, justly, fruitfully. But I doubt that a long-term solution lies in imposed ignorance and so I generally take pride as well as pleasure in adding to our scientific understanding. In a recent PBS special ("A. Einstein: How I See the World"), the narrator discusses Einstein's role, both scientific and political, in the series of events that led to



Hiroshima and comments, "Einstein did not feel guilty about his science. But he did feel guilty." I felt guilty as the missiles flew over Iraq—but as a citizen, a Christian, a Catholic—not as an engineer.

The tension in the work is occasionally mirrored by tension in the workplace. Religious belief in my work community, at least publicly proclaimed, is the exception rather than the rule. Being a Catholic, being committed to any religious tradition, does make you different on most engineering or science faculties at major universities. I have always been told, in homilies now numbering into the thousands, that faith is *supposed* to make you different, different from "the world." But I'm not sure that being intellectually suspect is what the homilists had in mind.

How does my faith manifest itself in my work? I'd like to think that it manifests itself in my attitudes toward other people, in giving all people the fundamental respect they deserve, regardless of their talents, their status, or the inconvenient times at which they wander into my office. I'd like to think that it is reflected in a commitment more to an internal set of values and goals than to whatever behavior will trigger the external reward system. I'd like to think it causes me to do what I do with more compassion, more justice, more hope, and more love than might otherwise be true. I'd like to think so, but I don't really know.

I don't know, in part because some of the most compassionate, just, hopeful, and loving people I know don't share my faith at all, don't believe in our God, their God, perhaps any God. And yet I have found that we often have more in the way of common values than is the case with many people who wear their Catholicism with a capital C. I suspect that what leads them and leads me is both within and beyond my faith and I grow increasingly convinced that God is infinitely generous in creating paths to himself. The experience of living and working with people who do not share a Christian faith tradition is an increasingly common one in this country—and one that must anticipate the "kingdom of God." About two-thirds of the world's population is not Christian, and my work environment, perhaps more than most, reflects that reality. As Catholic Christians, we embark from an immense tradition of belief, and yet it is only that—an embarking point. Ultimately, we must each call upon our own individual experience. I have had just enough of what might be termed "religious experience" to entice, startle, and intrigue

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me. Just enough so that I can never deny it, but not so much that I don't wonder, in an expression I heard somewhere, why "God is so damn subtle." So if my work colleagues know that I am a Catholic, they know that I am a doubting and tolerant one, believing in a God who is merciful with our doubts and prefers them to our certainties.

I experience that God in my tradition, in my family and friends, in beauty, in service to others. Yet the wellspring of it all is prayer, a prayer life that is as fruitful as it is hesitant and temperamental. I quiet myself, at the end of what is always a long and busy day, and go very slowly, meditatively, prayerfully, through the day—each person and encounter, each activity and incident. I ask myself two questions: Where was God, and where were the opportunities to serve? This has worked, worked so well that it has, at times, caused me to retreat in fear. When I am able, through my prayer, to look at my life honestly, I do see God—as well as my own sinfulness. And as I draw closer and closer in prayer to this source of my life, I feel deeply the words from Hebrew Scripture, "Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground." It is not frightening there, but neither is it peaceful. Taking off your shoes in such a place is an act of trust, and risk.

The risk pays off. I have had people enter my life who can only have been sent by God. I have had moments that can only be described as encounters with God—limited in number but powerful enough to last a lifetime. It is hard to share these things with friends or colleagues when they ask "How can any intelligent person believe such nonsense?" Most often though, they are referring to actions or statements associated with our history or our hierarchy which, on occasion I do agree, can boggle the mind. Even granting the ability of the secular press to make us appear sillier than we sometimes are, I don't look forward to the lunchtime comments on days when our bishops meet to discuss condoms or holy days, or when the *L.A. Times* reports Rome's latest dictates on the "role of women." The collection of dogma we have acquired throughout our history and our continuing propensity to stand in opposition to truths that emerge from science, other religious traditions or, more recently, women's movements throughout the world, are not easy to defend.

Despite our shortcomings though, I also tell them how much I need and value the Catholic community. The sacraments, the common prayer, the social teaching, those countless homilies are important. I need the company of those willing to look at their lives in the light of the gospel, because I know I wouldn't have the courage to do it alone. My faith is weak, my service limited, my commitments often shallow, my love often lacking—and yet, despite it all, my faith tells me that the God who brought life into being will use that life, my life and all other lives, to help bring about the kingdom. That belief is challenged daily though by my own selfishness and by the knowledge that children die from hunger in a world of plenty, their lives consumed by the struggle for the barest of existence. I encounter God too in those whose brief lives are testimony to our seemingly unredeemable state as a human family. Without Christ as a sign of redemption and the community of the faithful as a source of hope, despair is always at the door.

So tomorrow the alarm will go off again, and I will go back to work. I go in the hope that God will direct my efforts there and will give me the courage and insight to direct them elsewhere if and when that is God's will. There will be bad news and smog in L.A. There will be hungry children in the world and anxious students in my office and maybe, if we are lucky, a Eureka moment. "Your will today, Lord, and *please* help." □

Pamela Gross

Bowline

One free end
of the rope, held
in the left hand, is
a tree, upstanding.
The remaining length,
wound by the right,
forms a loop, a small
hole at the base
of the tree. And up
through this hole,
a hare—the rope's
other end—followed
nose-on-tail
by its fear of
fox, runs
a singleminded
route around
the tree, back
down through
the hole, into
darkness.

(They are all here. The hare's quivering
flank, its feinting, whipstitch course.
Panic. The chiseled face of the fox, eyes'
sure noose snapped taut. And smells.
The damp stink of fear. Bold, rank fox musk:
harsh, beguiling. The tree's stark trunk.
Its leaves down, perhaps. Their astounding
resins rising. The hole's blank mouth
opens, offering its dubious refuge.)

Pulled closed,
the knot never slips
or jams, even under
severe tension.
Tree, hole, fox, hare
are bound there.
And lasting.

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WHEN CATHOLICS COULD SING

WHO WAS GIULIO ROSPIGLIOSI?

EDWARD J. McKENNA

Who was Giulio Rospigliosi? My own introduction came through obscure references in musical dictionaries. He was the librettist to operas composed in Rome during the Baroque era (mid-seventeenth century), and was the inventor of the operatic style known in the nineteenth century as *opera buffa*, or simply "comic opera," raised to glory by Mozart and Rossini. His libretti are today only vaguely known, and none has survived as repertory. But what has survived is Rospigliosi's other identity. He is remembered in history as Pope Clement IX.

I had Rospigliosi (1600-69) in the back of my mind when an invitation to work with the Sistine Choir was extended to me in 1989 by Monsignor Domenico Bartolucci, the choir's director "perpetuo." Living and working within the very arms of the choir that stretches back to the Counter-Reformation (Palestrina, Animuccia, Morales), I inquired of Bartolucci whether he knew of Antonio Maria Abbatini (1595-1680), a choir member and composer who had been involved in the opera-making of the papal court of Clement IX. Yes, Bartolucci knew of Abbatini; he was a "good composer." A quick invitation from the Vatican archivist, Msgr. Charles Burns, brought me into direct contact with a libretto by Rospigliosi, *Dal Mal il Bene (From Bad to Good)*. The libretto was partly in Rospigliosi's own hand (1653), written while he was papal nuncio to the Spanish court. Educated in the Jesuit Collegio Romano and a graduate in philosophy and jurisprudence from the University of Pisa, in 1626 Rospigliosi visited Spain with his classmate, Francesco Barberini, a nephew of the reigning Pope Urban VIII. There he was introduced to Lope de Vega, a priest whose own skill in drama earned him papal interest and honor. De Vega is said to have praised the early works of the young Italian diplomat.

When he was just thirty-six years old, Rospigliosi was appointed canon of the basilica of St. Mary Major. (He was later advanced to its vicar, and is one of the few popes who chose to be buried there. His tomb lies directly in front of the main altar.)

For us who have grown up in the twentieth century, who have experienced the dichotomies presented by post-Enlightenment separation of church and state and post-Jansenist moralizing on the status of the priesthood, it is difficult to imagine the realities of seventeenth-century Rome. It was simply accepted that a youthful monsignor of the papal court such as Giulio Rospigliosi could and would present operas in the fashionable salons of the city, where tragedies, comedies, and tragicomedies were routinely given as entertainments by Rome's best singers and famous designers, such as Bernini, before visiting heads of state and ambassadors to the papal court.

By today's standards, the operas of Rospigliosi are enormous in length: They run well beyond four hours, most of it recitative, with only occasional (and usually brief) arias, dances, and interludes. There was an intense rivalry in those days between the operatic styles of Rome and Venice. By the time of Clemente Nono's accession (1667), Venetian opera was emphasizing the importance of music over words with the growing *fioratura* (ornamented recitative), expanding dissonance, and larger orchestrations of Monteverdi. By comparison, the Roman opera is chaste and demure. (I recently described this difference to Marilyn Horne, the renowned mezzo-soprano, saying that I didn't believe singers today would be interested in singing operas that were mostly recitative. "Oh, Father," she responded, "you should know that the more I sing arias, the more I love recitative. It's there that you can really act out the drama!")

The historic musical rivalry between the two cities ended with

REV. EDWARD J McKENNA, *a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, is a music critic and former associate editor of* Worship *magazine. He edited* The Collegeville Hymnal *(Liturgical Press, 1990), and with Rev. Andrew M. Greeley as librettist, composed the opera* The Magic Cup, *which premiered at Chicago's Angel Guardian Theatre in 1988.*

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the complete vanquishing of the Roman Baroque opera by the adventurous Venetians. (It is perhaps also the reason why opera-composing has almost disappeared today. The stress of writing "big arias" to compete with Verdi or Puccini, or to write the elongated and convoluted leitmotiv recitatives of Wagner, has led to the demise of a lengthy list of contemporary opera composers.)

My delving into the Rospigliosi manuscripts uncovered an original copy of the complete score to a three-act opera, *La Comica del Cielo* (*The Heavenly Comedy*—literally, *The Funny Lady of Heaven*), by Pope Clement IX, then the reigning pontiff, and Abbatini, for presentation at the Roman carnival of 1668. Prior to this, as papal nuncio to the Spanish king, Archbishop Rospigliosi had composed texts for at least eight operas. Some dealt with religious allegories (*Sant' Alessio*), others with Crusade heroes (*Erminio sul Giordano*), and one was even about the eyebrow-raising moralities of Boccaccio. In 1657, Rospigliosi had been chosen cardinal-secretary of state under Pope Alexander VII. Ten years later he succeeded Alexander as pope.

The Heavenly Comedy was produced to raves. The gossip columns ("*Avvisi di Roma*"—even then, the paparazzi!) did not disclose the authorship of the opera, except as one "Casino." It was performed eight times at Palazzo Ludovisi in February 1668, with Lenzi directing ten soloists in fourteen roles, with ballet and very small orchestra (two violins, cello, and clavicembalo/keyboard). With the stage décor and machinery (a necessary part of Baroque entertainments) by the master, Bernini; and the solo singing by Pasqualini, Vittori, and Bianchi—castrati of the Sistine Choir—it was the culmination of a long history of ecclesiastical drama.

I have pored over the text (adapted from the Spanish play, *La Baltasara*). It is rich in rhyme and rhythm of that extraordinarily musical language, Italian. The opera's theme is the religious conversion of a classical actress and comedienne. Weary with the struggles of love and life, she wanders off to find peace in the desert. Of course, the devil is there to tempt her, and her lover begs for her return. But Baltasara remains faithful to her Christian vision and the libretto ends with her heroic death in a cavern.

Now that's hardly a "comedy" except in the Christian sense. But the medium aids the message with the joking, unsophisticated humor of the lovers, and the common man, Biscotto. The devil's miracles of deceit in act 2, provided with the legerdemain of Bernini, undoubtedly were the talk of the Roman carnival. Doubtless, the pope-librettist came to see the opera, but in disguise. It was the custom of even serious cardinals to engage in "travesties" during the pre-Lenten festivities. With the seamless and gently beautiful melodies of Abbatini over sometimes lush chromatic harmonies, *La Comica del Cielo* is a spiritual parodying of that difficult yet ever-intriguing time when the Roman Catholic church stood at the center of human action, at least in Western Europe, a time when popes could be actively involved in opera-making as well as peacemaking.

Ten years before the election of Papa Rospigliosi, Rome had been visited by a terrible plague. Fifteen thousand of its 120,000 inhabitants had died. The only active theater in the city had been closed. Known for his *mitezza* (mild-manneredness), Pope Clement opened the first public opera house in Rome, ancestor to the famed Tor di Nona that Verdi knew by the Tiber (later torn down to make a dike). With the Jansenists perhaps permanently damaging theology in France, and the Turks disrupting much of the Mediterranean, Clemente Nono attempted to deal with them diplomatically. He abolished abuse of the Jews within the Papal States, reduced taxes on the *contadini* and *cittadini* (who flooded to hear his operas), made ten cardinals—but *not* his ambitious and gifted nephew—and protected the arts. Yet as pope he did not have time to become a "grand patron of the arts," not, I believe, because of his failing health, but simply because he desired to be what we who live in a post-Vatican II milieu have defined, somewhat sloppily, as "pastoral." He loved the world entirely and wished to configure it to Christ. Elected pope at the age of sixty-seven and dying just short of his seventieth birthday, Rospigliosi left only a "Clementine peace" with the troublesome Jansenist bishops, a compromise that prevented yet another schism from rending the church. No great buildings, just a chapel at Santa Sabina and the gorgeous "Angel bridge" at Castel Sant' Angelo stand for his brick-and-mortar remembrance. He was what Gerard Manley Hopkins referred to in "Wreck of the Deutschland" (29) as a "Simon Peter of a soul," a pastoral pope who knew the who, the what, and the why. He could not play "the patron" because he was so profoundly "the artist."

That treasured masterpiece of the Vatican *pinacoteca*, Carlo Maratta's magnificent oil painting of Clement IX, shows it all. Rospigliosi as a man was fated to serve a church that would ignore his magnificence, largely because it was *spiritual*. In Maratta's painting, the pope's hand rests lightly on the edge of a Missal and his sensitive, slightly pained smile is suffused with frailty. Yet here was the man who summoned Oliver Plunket, rector of the Irish College in Rome, to restore the primal See of Patrick, sending him to a sure death. This slightly effete artist who briefly occupied Peter's chair knew the reality of evil in the world: its seeming ability to distort the truth and turn individuals against one another. He was one who sought to heal all wounds. It's all there, in the lightsome eye, *and* in

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GROUP CRISES

'TWO TRAINS' & 'CONVERSATIONS'

There is a running gag in August Wilson's *Two Trains Running* which works in a variety of ways, as running gags have a way of doing. West, the millionaire undertaker, comes regularly to Memphis Lee's restaurant for pie and coffee, and since Risa, who cooks and serves, refuses to offer sugar until it is asked for, he routinely says, hardly breaking the flow of his conversation, "Let me get a little sugar here, Risa." He then picks up the dispenser, does not use it, and pushes it away. One of the characters mentions this habitual behavior in case the audience does not pick up on it immediately, and after that all eyes focus on West until the sugar ritual is complete. As usual with such jokes, the risibility quotient diminishes with each repetition, and Wilson or, more likely, the director Lloyd Richards strains to find variations on the offering and the rejecting of the sugar. The routine ceases to be a joke at all, becomes a device that emphasizes that the regulars at Memphis's—nicely realized by the ensemble of players—form a family of sorts. Beyond that, in the larger context of the play, the neighborhood, the black community of the 1960s, in which the play is set, it might almost be a metaphor: a person may not want to use sugar but he wants to have access to sugar so that he can casually not use it.

There is a similar joke in the way in which Risa moves, so slowly that she recalls—in parody, I suppose—the Stepin Fetchit style stereotypes from 1930s' movies. When Sterling, to whom she is attracted, goes out to face the numbers boss, she races after him, legs churning, and gets a laugh from the audience. A corny joke really; one can almost hear Mantan Moreland saying, "Feets, do your duty." Yet, there is more to it than that. Risa's customary pace sets the placid rhythm in the restaurant, and her sudden rush suggests that expenditure of energy rests on a real goal.

For a play with so many subplots, *Two Trains* is an almost plotless play. It is primarily a depiction of a place in which a group of people talk aimlessly, pursue private goals, shore up one another. There is a resident philosopher in Holloway, who sits at his regular table offering comments, advice, anecdotes; and there is an offstage wonderworker, Aunt Ester, who is said to be over three hundred years old and who demands only that the seeker throw a twenty dollar bill into the river to make things work in his favor—as they do for Memphis, Sterling, and Risa. Even Hambone gets his ham, although after his death, but then he never had twenty dollars or a consultation with Aunt Ester. He is a slightly retarded character, like the trumpeter in *Fences*, who constantly repeats that he wants his ham, promised payment for a job that he did long ago for the local butcher. The play works its way to a final benign moment in which everyone joins forces to see that Hambone gets a suitable funeral.

The general feel of the play is gentle, the restaurant a shelter which, like the bar in *The Time of Your Life*, cannot really shut out the world. Memphis's story of the killing of his mule down South and Holloway's explanation of "stacking niggers," using the work of blacks to buy blacks, are graphic indications of white oppression. It is a subject that trickles through much of the talk, particularly from Holloway. The other force ruffling the lives in the restaurant is the new call for Black Power which Memphis dismisses on the assumption that a man makes his own power. "I don't know how these niggers think sometimes. Talking about Black Power with their hands and their pockets empty. You can't do nothing without a gun." Holloway and Memphis argue about whether guns solve or create problems, but the offstage rally celebrating Malcolm X's birthday is a peaceful one. Wolf, the numbers runner, comments on the size of the crowd: "Everybody was down there. Even the niggers that swear up and down on two stacks of Bibles that they ain't black...they was down there." The play focuses on the small group in the restaurant, but it is clear that they are part of a larger community that is taking shape. There is hope in Hambone's funeral and in the 1960s' promises. Yet, as I write this, a few days after the Los Angeles riots, *Two Trains Running* seems more of an ancient-history play than it did when I saw it in mid-April.

Herb Gardner's *Conversations with My Father* is another play with a cohesive-divisive group—Eddie Ross's family and the regular patrons of his bar—at the center of an ethnic identity drama. Although the group is mildly picturesque and supportive of Eddie on occasion, they are not an ensemble like the one in *Two Trains*; they are background, like the changing decor of Eddie's never changing Canal Street saloon. Their peripheral position is inevitable for this is a play about Eddie (Judd Hirsch), whom we follow through forty years (1936-76), an abusive and often funny man who browbeats his wife, his children, and his friends. His eye is always on American success in a big way, and if energy, determination, and an acid tongue could do the job, he might actually get out of his Canal Street dump (in fact, Tony Walton's set makes it rather attractive) and triumph in a fancy uptown bar. In the process of Americanization, he tries to discard his identity as a Jewish immigrant (hence the name Ross), complaining about his wife's haphazard English and mocking Zaretsky, the Yiddish actor who rents a room above the bar. In the kind of irony that Gardner likes, Zaretsky dies leaving a large sum of money he has accumulated from a program, based on the presumably dead Yiddish theater, that he had carried to Jewish groups around the country.

The play is structured as a memory/quest piece in which Eddie's son Charlie (Tony Shalhoub), who wanders around the edge of the action, tries to understand his father, to erase his resentment at Eddie's dismissive way with him. Charlie is a successful writer of pleasant ethnic tales, a bowdlerized version of Eddie and his bar, but it is the real thing that haunts him. I do not know whether or not Charlie found peace, but he certainly

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realized that his father was not likely to soften into a sentimental stereotype. Nor is Gardner's grander intention clear; was Eddie a failed barkeep because he was a de-ethnicized Jew or an unpleasant person or a dreamer disguised as a pragmatist? Perhaps it doesn't matter. What *Conversations* offers, as usual with Gardner, are sharp lines, playable scenes, and—as Judd Hirsch demonstrates—a central character to make an actor's mouth water.

GERALD WEALES

SCREEN

ROBERT ALTMAN IS BACK

'THE PLAYER'

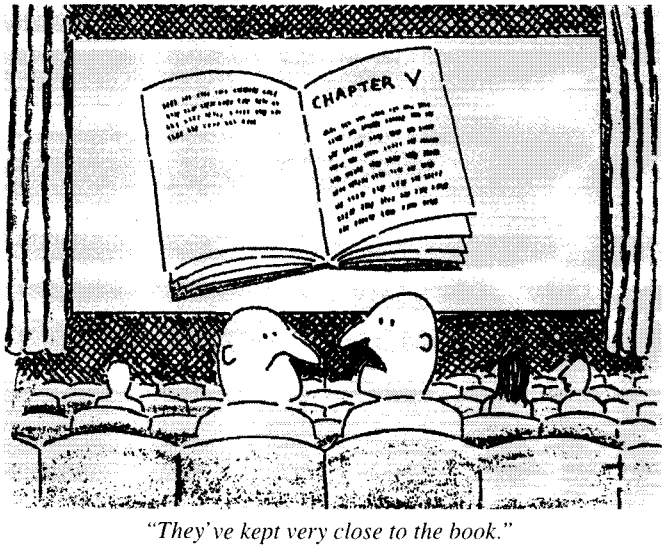
In his glory days, Robert Altman was a subverter of conventional stories. He took a standard service-comedy novel and turned it into that ode to hipsterism, *M*A*S*H*; transformed a pulp Western called *McCabe* into *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, a hippy's dream of the frontier; undermined Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* and blew it up into an extended rendition of a Fellini parade, L.A.-style. These stories, before Altman took them in hand, were genre pieces with linear plots and tiny casts. Altman turned them into dreamlike tours of singular milieus containing dozens of characters. We walked out of these films with a buzz on, and that buzz was a continuation of the buzz on the soundtracks: surgeons wisecracking while jovially operating under appalling conditions (*M*A*S*H*), barroom palaver (*McCabe*), the grousing of gamblers in *California Split*, the conversational crosscurrents of *A Wedding*, the country music intrigues of *Nashville*. Altman took plots and turned them into parties.

Most surprising then is Altman's faithful rendering of Michael Tolkin's novel, *The Player*. Tolkin, whose directorial debut, *The Rapture*, I hailed as the most original American movie of the last few years, did the script himself and has reproduced all of the book's important incidents and characters. It would be nice to report that this collaboration between an old, returning master and a young, arriving one has resulted in a masterpiece. But it hasn't. Despite a few clever passages, *The Player* is a torpid, shallow movie. Altman and Tolkin have been faithful only to the book's plot and the plot is the least interesting thing about the novel. So, without meaning this time, the old subverter has subverted again, and the results are unfortunate. Instead of demolishing a story for the sake of creating a new, self-sustaining movie, Altman has kept the plot intact but wound up with a film that is dehydrated.

The plot: Griffin Mill, the vice-president in charge of production at a fictional Hollywood studio, has been getting death threats from an anonymous scriptwriter apparently maddened by Mill's cavalier treatment of his story proposal (though Griffin cannot remember meeting him). Mill tracks down a writer whom he supposes to be his tormentor and, in an access of cold-blooded murderousness which he himself doesn't and will never understand, kills the fellow. (But the film's killing, exceedingly well-staged, is less a gratuitous act than a hot-blooded manslaughter.) Mill has left enough of a trail to attract the police but not quite enough to get himself immediately arrested. Then he discovers that he killed the wrong man and so now he has both the law and madman hot on his trail. The last thing Mill needs is to fall in love with the live-in girlfriend of the murdered man for this would give the police a motive for the crime. Yet Griffin does indeed woo and bed her even while under police surveillance. Just as the noose seems to be tightening around the executive's neck, happenstance comes to his rescue.

This would be a perfectly serviceable plot for a thriller but Michael Tolkin did not choose to write one. Instead, *The Player* is a fascinating tour of an exceedingly quirky mind. Griffin Mill is, in his external professional life, a predator, a pitiless champion of the "bottom line," a shark. But he is also something of a mystic who is actually driven more by his obsessions and weird intuitions than by consideration of power or finance. The reader is constantly startled by this character's meditations: his feeling that the murder was a sacrifice made to appease his anonymous persecutor; his fantasies of amusing his future cellmates with tales of his executive and amorous adventures; his strange love/hatred of the (to him) invisible audience which he works so hard to entertain and degrade. Griffin is rather like Camus's Meursault, but he's an all-American Meursault whose utter detachment from his fellow humans leads him not into drifting but into ruthless competition. It is the reader's access to the not-quite-insanity of Griffin's mind that makes the novel interesting, not the all too familiar mechanics of a murderer's cat-and-mouse game with the police.

But the film's Griffin Mill is opaque; we have no access to his mind. After the slaying, we see nothing but a tense young man in fashionable clothes driving from office to police station to restaurants to parties to story conferences, dealing with people nervously or ruthlessly, and fending off the police in interrogation sessions staged too offhandedly to be suspenseful. Tim Robbins,



"They've kept very close to the book."

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Pamela Gross

Cow Hitch / Lark's Head

"A knot used on baggage ties or whenever a parcel is bound with a loop of the line. Serviceable when equal tension applied on both standing ends, but useless when strain comes on one part only."

—Raould Graumont,
Handbook of Knots, 1945

This is how it takes
its name:

Cow Hitch, the go-between.
A tongued loop passing
through the brass nose ring
translates each sides's equal
need. The sturdy refusals
of banked flesh, built
into muscles' stalwart
bulk. An idea of *unyielding*.
And, just as adamant,
will hauls at the other end.
For either side, slack
means balked wish. So, back
and forth the hitch ferries
the quarrel.

Or, *Lark's Head*.
Another tongue
to transmit argument.
Its strident song
runs up, skewy, slurred,
emphatic at the end.
From an open mound
of earth, nest-tethered,
the see-sawed
protest climbs, descends,
all day long, a gantline
voice extends between
the twinned demands
of heaven, ground.

right as Mill and occasionally shows us a glimpse of the freak inside the suit, but for the most part little more is asked of this actor than to wrinkle his brow in concentration or slit his eyes in suspicion or widen them in alarm.

With the psychology of its lead character missing, some of the oddities of the plot seem downright absurd. For instance, when Mill first gets threatening post cards, why doesn't he report this to the police? After all, issuing death threats is a crime. But we never question this in the book because we are privy to Mill's paranoiac fears about appearing to be less than all-powerful. ("Word would get out that he was a target. Stigma.") But without that insight Mill looks simple-minded.

In the movie, as in the book, Mill risks imprisonment for the sake of a romance. The film's girl is played by Greta Scacchi who makes June a typical California airhead (despite some nonsense about an Icelandic background). Since the movie's Mill also seems shallow, we can simply dismiss the affair as a case of like being attracted to like. But do shallow Machiavellis really risk life imprisonment for a grand *amour*? In the book the girl is pathetic but not shallow and, no matter what we think of Griffin's overall character, the passion he feels for June is downright Lawrentian in its ineluctability. We never doubt that this man would risk destroying himself for this particular woman.

One of *The Player*'s most talked-about features is the presence of dozens of Hollywood stars playing themselves. This, in addition to the well chosen locations, certainly helps create verisimilitude. Aside from that, the star appearances are only used as "cameos." They goose the audience into whispering, "Wasn't that Jack Lemmon in the corner?" or "Gosh, Harry Belafonte hasn't aged a day!" If *The Player* is the trenchant satire its admirers claim it to be, why do all the star walk-ons seem like trailers for "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous"? (But the use of Bruce Willis and Julia Roberts in the final scene is delicious satire indeed.)

Altman is still a highly skilled director and a few images from *The Player* linger in the mind: the murder victim drowning in a shallow canal with a few ascending bubbles announcing his last seconds of life; Mill talking to June on his cordless phone as he (unseen by her) lurks outside her house and spies on her through a window. Most enjoyable of all are the story pitches made by Dean Stockwell and Richard E. Grant as two writer-hustlers. Their extroverted comic energies momentarily break through the torpor of this movie and remind us of how good Altman is at capturing the comedy of noisy, self-intoxicated promoters, and make us wonder at why there isn't more of this sort of satire in this movie about an industry that is fueled on self-promotion.

Michael Tolkin's *The Player*, a somber book by a storyteller who is an odder duck than Altman ever was even in his screwiest pictures, is simply not the best vehicle for this outgoing, generous, essentially comic showman to ride. Still, any movie generally recognized as a comeback *is* a comeback, at least as far as it is an issue. So, now that Altman seems to be back in Hollywood harness, let us hope that he can pull himself in the direction of projects than truly suit his temperament.

RICHARD ALLEVA

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Can we all get along?

TWO NATIONS
Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal
Andrew Hacker
Charles Scribner's Sons, $24.95, 257 pp.

RACE
How Blacks and Whites Think & Feel about the American Obsession
Studs Terkel
The New Press, $24.95, 403 pp.

Don Wycliff

Among the friends that I made in college in the late 1960s was an Italian-American fellow from a working-class family in a medium-sized city in the Northeast. Like all of us in those days, he was involved both in self-discovery and self-creation, trying out different lifestyles and personae. One year he was deep into Christianity and the spiritual life; another year he was an antiwar militant.

The last time I saw this fellow was about a year after I graduated from college, two years after he had graduated. He was still trying out different ways of life. And what he was into then was being black.

We met on a street in South Bend. He was driving by, caught sight of me, and stopped. He was accompanied by a young black woman whom he was dating at the time. His dress, his manner, his speech were all uncannily "black"—more so, in fact, than mine have ever been. And yet, there was something that didn't quite ring true, something not quite authentic.

That's very much the way I felt after reading Andrew Hacker's *Two Nations*. In many respects, he did as fine a job as any white writer I have ever read of getting inside the heads of black people. Unfortunately, what he captured best was the sense of victimization and insult that can never be absent from an African-American's consciousness. What he seems to miss or not fully appreciate, are those elements of black consciousness that allow most African-Americans to surmount racist circumstances, or at least not surrender to and let themselves be defined by white people's categories.

Consider, for example, this shrewd observation of Hacker made in the course of discussing residential segregation: "For a white family to be seen as living in a mixed—or changing—neighborhood can be construed as a symptom of surrender, indeed as evidence that they are on a downward spiral. If you are black, these white reactions brand you as a carrier of contaminations. No matter what your talents or attainments, you are seen as infecting a neighborhood simply because of your race. This is the ultimate insult of segregation."

On the other hand, Hacker nowhere shows a recognition that black residential "segregation" is not solely the result of whites' choices. Many African-Americans prefer to live principally among African-Americans—not because they dislike whites, but because they prefer the company and culture of blacks.

Hacker has been assailed in a number of places for a destructive "ultraliberalism." This indictment apparently stems from his heavy emphasis on white racism as the cause of the plight of blacks.

This is risky business. As Shelby Steele pointed out in *The Content of Our Character*, solutions that grow out of white guilt generally are designed to assuage the guilt, not necessarily to solve blacks' problems.

Nevertheless, I welcome Hacker's emphasis. I do so, in part, because it comes from a white writer and not a black one. It long ago ceased to be productive for blacks to scold whites about racism, in part because it long ago became apparent that there is a large element of hypocrisy in such behavior.

I welcome it also because it is a long-needed counter to some of the patently absurd efforts of recent years to exculpate whites entirely, to declare them not only guiltless, but not responsible. In this connection, I think in particular of the comments of Associate Justice Antonin Scalia of the Supreme Court, who declared that immigrants like his father were in no way to blame for evils committed under slavery. This as if blame were the point. The point is responsibility, and American citizenship entails sharing not just in the society's benefits, but also in its debts and liabilities.

That said, Hacker's "ultraliberalism" does, nevertheless, affect his analysis for the worse. Where it gets in the way is in his discussion of black responsibility or, rather, his lack of such discussion. In all too typical liberal fashion, Hacker is unwilling to acknowledge the havoc wrought in

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poor black communities by the epidemic of single-parenthood and male absence. "This is not the place," he writes, "to debate whether optimal family life requires the full-time presence of two parents bound by a legal marriage. What can and should be stressed is that millions of American children have grown up in homes with a single parent, almost always their mother."

Hacker thus begs the question of how well those children have grown up, in comparison with their counterparts in two-parent families. The sociological evidence daily becomes more convincing that they have a rougher go of it in both childhood and adulthood. And among blacks, where two-thirds of all births in recent years have been out of wedlock, it's an especially rough go.

This is not the only hard punch that Hacker slips. He deals with a whole range of desperate statistical indicators of black social disarray by comparing black and white rates (of teen-age pregnancy, for example) over time. The conclusion—that the rates for both groups have been rising and that the higher black rates have remained roughly the same as multiples of the white rates—is small comfort when, for example, more than half of all black children are being reared in poverty. Like it or not, whites have more margin for error and foolish behavior than do blacks. It's not fair, but it's the fact with which we must deal.

For Hacker, this fact poses the central moral question of America's persistent dilemma. It is, he says, a question for white Americans: "Is it right to impose on members of an entire race a lesser start in life, and then to expect from them a degree of resolution that has never been demanded from your race?"

Hacker is frankly pessimistic about American race relations. He holds out little hope that whites will answer that question in a way that would lead to bridging of what he calls a "huge racial chasm."

It would be interesting to know how the events in Los Angeles—the acquittal of the white police officers who beat Rodney King and the subsequent riots—have affected his estimate of things. They could hardly have made him more pessimistic. One wonders whether, paradoxically, they might have provoked some hope.

More likely than not, they did for Studs Terkel. Terkel's latest volume is not oral history, at which he has become a master, but oral sociology. He put his tape recorder in front of nearly one hundred mouths—male and female; black, white, Hispanic, Asian; young and old; liberal and not so liberal—and transcribed what they had to say on the issue of race.

Old optimist that he is, Terkel has managed to find more hopeful voices than despairing ones; more kindly voices than hateful ones; more decent voices than mean-spirited ones. How hopeful the reader feels after reading them will depend on how fairly one supposes they represent the American generality.

On the strength of what has happened over the last five days—I write on the Sunday following the Rodney King beating verdicts—Hacker's pessimism seems more justified than Terkel's hope. And Rodney King's poignant question hangs in the air: "Can we all get along?" □

TRAVELS WITH TOM

THE PLACE WHERE SOULS ARE BORN
A Journey into the American Southwest
Thomas Keneally, Introduction by Jan Morris
Simon & Schuster, $20, 249 pp.

Thomas Swick

Here is an interesting idea: A book by an Australian, introduced by a Welsh woman, about the least "European" region of the United States.

It helps your natural dubiousness to learn that the Australian is the highly regarded Thomas Keneally (author of, among other books, *Schindler's List*) and the Welsh woman is the doyenne of contemporary travel writers, Jan Morris, who over the last few years has enlisted some of her favorite authors as contributors to a travel series called "Destinations." With *The Place Where Souls Are Born*, Keneally joins an impressive list that includes M.F.K. Fisher, Herbert Gold, and William Murray.

I am sorry to report, however, that his book is not as engaging as the others in the series. My suspicions were aroused when I turned to the acknowledgments page at the back. (New books, like new cars, should be looked over carefully, front and back, before being started.) Almost the entire page is taken up with the titles of the books that helped Keneally along the way, while four lines are given to the names of the people. This, I thought to myself, could be a long haul.

The journey covers four states: Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico (all decoratively mapped in the front). But the book is not concerned with the mechanics of travel—we hear little about the long drives from state to state and almost nothing about the author's wife and daughter who are accompanying him—but rather the ravages of history.

Keneally starts off, outside Denver, with some recreational skiing and lengthy ruminations on the Ute Indians. From the former activity, we get: "Aerobics at high and lovely altitudes have a very humanizing influence on a marriage"—an observation that is felicitous even while being somewhat pompous.

But Keneally's real interest is with the Indians. "The Ute were intransigent nomads....They were dangerous fellows, a peril to European livestock and to European stock. Like the Celts, they honored warriorhood. They were stubborn."

This passage sets the tone for the rest of the book, which is replete with historical vignettes, culled from the books listed on the acknowledgments page, interlaced with personal reflections. By the time we get to New Mexico, having made a counterclockwise loop from Denver, we have read

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about more tribes than we can remember. Keneally, apart from his obvious respect for these peoples, seems to delight in the very mention of their names and the names of their settlements. "A pause was thereby brought to the essential Eagle Clan and Arrow Shaft ceremonies. Other Hopi in Oraibi, Waipi, Shungopovi, and Mishongnovi, so that they could take over the ceremonies and continue the cycle, decided that the population of Awatobi should be massacred."

There seem to be two fundamental problems with Keneally's approach. A travel book—especially one built, like this one, around a journey (as opposed to the "sedentary" travel books of Gerald Brenan and Elliot Paul)—is by nature cursory and impressionistic. The history of the native peoples of the American Southwest is ancient and complex, and so does not lend itself to this sort of passing glance. Instead of a revealing portrait, we get a confused mosaic.

Considering this handicap, it might have made more sense to focus on how Native Americans are faring in the "European" Southwest of today. In fact, that Southwest is curiously absent from these pages. Apart from some brief descriptions of the suburban sprawl of Phoenix and Albuquerque, there is little sense of contemporary life. Too many passages, with their recollections of the past, sound as if they were written—or at least could have been—back home in Sydney.

One of the most interesting parts of the book, for me, is the discussion of D.H. Lawrence—a superb travel writer himself—and his relationship to this part of the world. "We cannot go back to the savages," he wrote, "not a stride. We can be in sympathy with them. We can take a great curve in their direction....But we cannot turn the current of our life backwards....So many 'reformers' and 'idealists' who glorify the savages in America. They are death-birds, life-haters. Renegades." Keneally, calling Lawrence "an unrepentant Caucasian," claims that his point is "the crucial debate in our relationship to tribal people and is still being argued in New Mexico and elsewhere." But, sad to say, it is not much argued in these pages.

The other problem with the book is that Keneally depends so heavily on secondary sources. He spends entirely too much time with his history books, especially for a man who is so seemingly enamored of the intuitive ways of native peoples. Rarely are we introduced to living people, and when we are, rarely do they speak. There is virtually no dialogue—a critical failing for a travel book.

I suspect that the culprits here are Keneally's wife and daughter. Though, as I've said, we hardly hear of them, they are always silently present, keeping the author from getting around and meeting the people who would give his book life. Last year at the Key West Literary Seminar on Travel Writing, a distinguished panel was asked if travel writing had to be a solitary pursuit. The unanimous answer was yes. "Sad but true," added Jan Morris.

My advice to Keneally: Next time, leave home without them. □

AN UNFLAPPABLE MUSE

VLADIMIR NABOKOV
The American Years
Brian Boyd
Princeton University Press, $35, 783 pp.

Lee Siegel

Though he hoarded the physical details of existence with the exactness of a miser or a voluptuary, Vladimir Nabokov believed that without the recombining wiles of memory and imagination plain facts amount to nothing in the way of truth. In the Nabokovian cosmos an individual life serves as the stage on which an exultant consciousness can carry on its dialogue with time, mortality, and death. Nabokov, it might be said, regarded circumstance as painted backdrop and personality as theatrical garb. For both better and worse, Nabokov's current biographer has fixed his approach to his subject's life along the same aesthetic lines.

When it is successful, all art is realistic. If Nabokov pulled conjuror's tricks in his work, if he made startling swerves from one level of reality to another, it was partly because life came to him in remarkable patterns and coincidences. When V.D. Nabokov, Vladimir's distinguished liberal aristocrat father, whisked his family westward away from the Russian Revolution, Vladimir found himself on the deck of a Greek freighter with the Russian name *Nadezhda* (hope) playing chess with Nabokov senior as Bolshevik machine guns fired down into Sebastopol harbor. Settling in along with the cream of Russian intellectual and artistic life, the family took up residence in Berlin, in the midst of the sometimes violent byways of émigré politics. One spring night in 1922 a Russian monarchist unintentionally shot to death the senior Nabokov, who had been trying to protect the socialist revolutionary Milyukov, who in fact had been Nabokov's bitter ideological enemy. Exiled and bereaved, young Vladimir was fortunately provided with an unflappable muse. Persisting in his craft, he began to make a reputation for himself in Russian émigré circles as a writer of fiction, poetry, and drama under the pen name Sirin.

After graduating from Cambridge, Nabokov returned to Berlin and supported himself with odd jobs, including stints as an extra in German films. He met his future wife Vera (faith) at a charity ball in Berlin; she wore a black mask with a wolf's profile, which she refused to lower until the dandyish young author followed her outside. In 1937 Nabokov, Vera, and their young son Dmitri fled Germany to France, where they lived three years in desperate poverty despite Nabokov's widening renown beyond his original expatriate audience. Three years later, having been deprived by Lenin, then Stalin, and then Hitler of both his ancestral and his linguistic estate, Nabokov entered New York harbor with his wife and son. On its next

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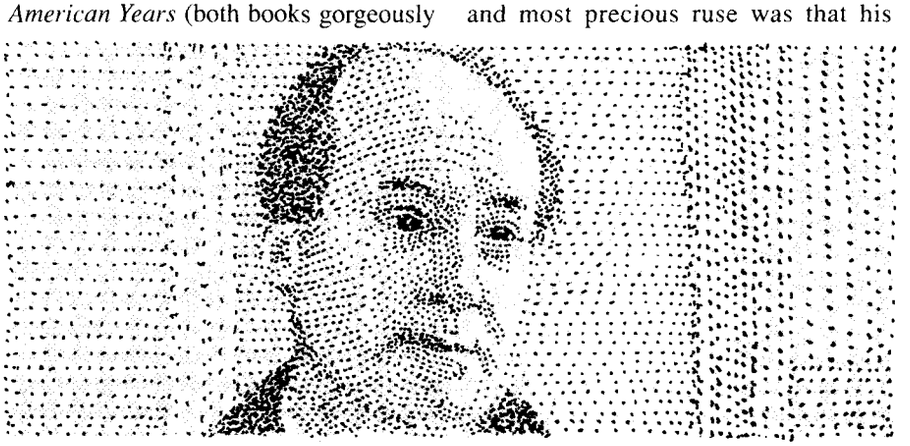
voyage the ship that had brought them over was sunk by a German U-boat. Such events gave Nabokov a unique sense of destiny. No wonder then that he took a perennial joy in firing off barbs at Freudians and their archetypes. Psychoanalysis' contribution to modern democracy left him cold; he wasn't about to allow what he regarded as the specially devised formation of his character and imagination to be couched, so to speak, in terms of run-of-the-mill influences anyone could lay claim to.

A connoisseur of memory, the loftily independent Nabokov left no doubt about how he wanted to be remembered. In a class lecture for his literature course at Cornell, he roared at a roomful of dutifully note-taking undergraduates:

> I hate tampering with the precious lives of great writers and I hate Tom-peeping over the fence of those lives—I hate the vulgarity of "human interest," I hate the rustle of skirts and giggles in the corridors of time—and no biographer will ever catch a glimpse of my private life.

Nabokov's first biographer, Andrew Field, after being teasingly led by his prospective subject through a lengthy courtship dance, wrote a work marred by factual errors and far-flung speculation. His book did little to dispel some readers' notion of Nabokov as an icy aristocrat of unkind spirit, whose two chief extra-literary recreations were collecting butterflies and enjoying *schadenfreude*—just the sort of fellow who would get a rarefied thrill out of torturing readers with the abstruse deceits and reflecting enigmas that flicker through Nabokov's work. Among other things Brian Boyd's two-volume biography, first *The Russian Years* and now *The American Years* (both books gorgeously printed and bound by Princeton University Press), sets itself the task of placing Nabokov in a wholly different light. Brian Boyd—the alliteration would have given Nabokov great pleasure—has correctively presented Nabokov the author as a good-hearted humanist, and Nabokov the man as an ideal husband, a perfect father, and a faultless friend.

That is to say, Boyd has gone more than a tad overboard. An analogously implausible biographical image would be an Augustine who comes to Carthage as to a cauldron bubbling with professional options, immediately applies to divinity school, and following graduation confidently settles down as the upwardly mobile head of an affluent congregation. Absent from Boyd's account is even the most cautious hint at the inner exorcisms that lie behind a work of art and invest it with the power to wrest belief from the clutches of common sense. Yet the unflattering revelations of an artist's days provide an ethical basis for curiosity—so much goodness for the collective memory rising out of so much transient mud. On the one hand, it's a pure delight to encounter Boyd's respect for his subject, his intelligent and sympathetic readings of Nabokov's works, his factual scrupulosity and his own sense of literary style. I doubt anyone will ever again be able to dismiss—or commend—Nabokov as an airy puzzlemaker indulging a superficial cruelty toward his hapless creations. Boyd, however, has composed Nabokov's biography the way Nabokov would have written it himself. It's as if these two necessary volumes were a deft gesture from beyond the grave, the impish last flourish of an author whose deepest conviction and most precious ruse was that his human reality lay entirely in his imaginative works.



In the introduction to his first volume, Boyd writes that the contradictions in Nabokov's life "can be resolved." Thus, in the current volume, twenty pages after quoting Nabokov on Jane Austen in a letter to Edmund Wilson—"I dislike Jane, and am prejudiced, in fact, against all women writers. They are in another class..."—Boyd blithely declares that "[Nabokov's] condescension was prompted not so much by Austen's gender...as by her adherence to eighteenth-century convention." Responding to critics who see in Nabokov's excessively devastating review of the English translation of Sartre's *La Nausée* a connection to Sartre's earlier dismissive review of the French translation of Nabokov's *Despair*, Boyd assures everyone that Nabokov had "no personal axe to grind" and hastily passes on to more straightforward matters. And if Nabokov had relieved himself of a grudge? If he absurdly didn't like women writers? If the servants at the luxury hotel in Montreux, Switzerland, where Nabokov spent his last years really didn't "adore" their most famous guest? It hardly seems worth telling the story of a life that didn't have at least two sides.

So the narrative goes, lovingly performing a cover-up job through nearly seven hundred pages, following Nabokov through teaching positions at Stanford, Wellesley, Harvard, and finally Cornell, minutely describing his numerous "lepping" trips, and occasionally pausing to unfold the drama of the author stopping work on one project to begin work on another. There is barely a peep about how Nabokov lived in society; about his famous feud with Edmund Wilson, for example; or about the time he spent in Hollywood writing the screenplay for *Lolita*; and hardly a word from the many people still alive who knew him. All those gaps are to Boyd's credit since he has accomplished what he set out to do: take for granted his subject's life as if it were a routine sublimation of the work. But it's disappointing that not a single reviewer bothered to mention, one way or another, that in order to defend Nabokov against the charge of formalism, Boyd has written the first-ever formalist biog-

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raphy. Instead there has been a misplaced protectiveness toward Nabokov, the understandable reaction to his never having received the Nobel Prize, an omission many Nabokovians blame on the conception of Nabokov as a coldhearted aesthete. Regret mixed with gratitude probably led some reviewers mistakenly to put Boyd's fairy tale on a par with Ellman's biography of Joyce, as well as Leon Edel's life of Henry James.

In the end, Boyd could be forgiven his immoderate discretions if in his labor of loyalty and disguise he had not unwittingly taken the satyr out of satire, and cast an odd ray of sunlight over the dark laughter that winds through Nabokov's fiction. For the lepidopterist who craved the ephemeral beauty of his catches and then crushed their thoraxes and pinned them to a board—without ever being certain that the specimen he had caught was not one of the last of its line—divided himself between predator and victim in his fiction. Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* and Charles Kinbote in *Pale Fire* are not just the loathsome creatures of Nabokov's fancy that Boyd would like us to see them as. They are brimming over with their creator's liveliest genes. Yet in the lunatic games they play with the lives of other people, they possess an artistic temperament but lack the artistic gift; they seek control without tenderness, ecstasy without self-surrender. Nabokov inhabits them so that he can have his revenge on history by imitating its perversity and outdoing it, and then he destroys them to slay the tyrant in himself and exalt the artist.

There is freedom and grace in Nabokov's daring escapes from narrative plane to narrative plane, as if he envisioned humankind shackled and locked in history's trunk, and conceived of the act of literary sleight-of-hand as a moral victory. But this treasure of imaginative knowledge came from someplace. Where it came from is still a moldy chest sunken in the depths of Nabokov's life. In keeping it submerged, Boyd has produced the biography that Nabokov, one of the most gifted writers of this century, has long deserved. In retrieving it with Boyd's degree of sympathy and intelligence, someone someday will write a biography that will be worthy of Nabokov's readers. □

WHO BUYS GUNS?

POINT BLANK
Guns and Violence in America
Gary Kleck
Aldine de Gruyter, $59.95, 512 pp.

Kevin Doyle

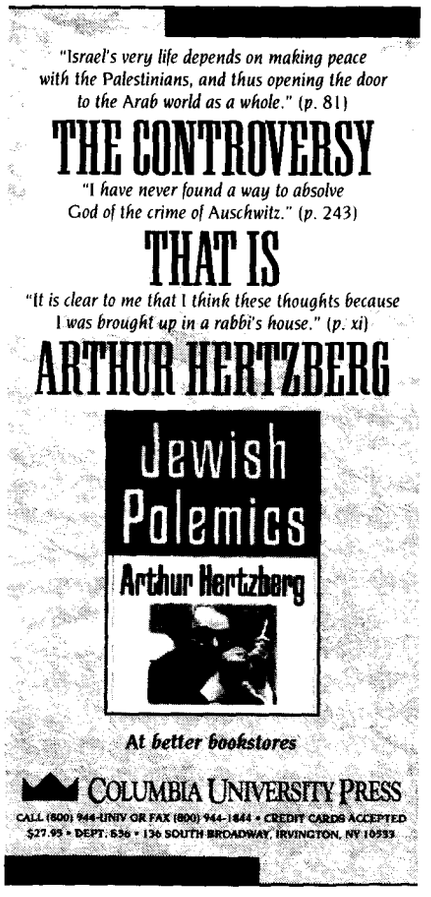
Whether taken as symptomatic of our bloodthirst or proof of our self-reliance, the firearm—along with Motown, Capra movies, McDonald's, and bourbon—is quintessentially American. Our civilian population has armed itself more heavily than any other on the planet. Gun ownership varies regionally, with a Rocky Mountain high and a New England low. But, overall, roughly half the nation's households, and a quarter of its shops, keep a pistol, a long arm, or both.

Of course, our society's arsenal-at-large, consisting of 100 to 200 million guns, ceases to be an anthropological oddity and becomes a public policy concern once the body count begins: 1985, with over 30,000 national gun deaths, was not unusual. Suicides accounted for the majority of these deaths. About 40 percent were homicides and 5 percent were accidental. Handguns, not shoulder weapons, figured in these fatalities most often. Handguns, likewise, figured in 540,000 of the 650,000 crimes in which guns served as at least threatening props.

For many, such statistics convey some bloody, horrible news. Still, they also point to an obvious fix, a neat social reform that should reduce carnage and, culturally, take off some rough red-neck edges. They point to one of the coziest and most wholesome tenets of the liberal creed—gun control.

In *Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America,* criminal justice professor Gary Kleck aims, *inter alia,* to make liberal thinking about guns a little less comfy and cozy. The professed liberal Democrat does an interesting job. We all know about the mail-order rifle used to slay a gallant young president in the year national gun control debate first took root. Kleck's reader, however, learns early on that JFK was himself a gun owner and lifetime NRA member. She will also learn that Eleanor Roosevelt held a carry permit for a revolver. And she'll learn that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antigun laws targeted Southern blacks, immigrants, and other "troublemakers."

Less symbolically and more substantively, Kleck, though shunning all Second Amendment absolutism, casts empirical doubt on some of the most fundamental assumptions, spoken and unspoken, of gun opponents. Just a few: The American gun owner is ignorant, macho, and more likely to commit violent acts and harbor racist


"Israel's very life depends on making peace with the Palestinians, and thus opening the door to the Arab world as a whole." (p. 81)
THE CONTROVERSY
"I have never found a way to absolve God of the crime of Auschwitz." (p. 243)
THAT IS
"It is clear to me that I think these thoughts because I was brought up in a rabbi's house." (p. xi)
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sentiments than the nonowner. Kleck discerns little correlation between ownership and education. Further, he finds the woman-under-arms no rarity. More than one in ten females can boast gun ownership (recently allowing *U.S. News* to count 70,000 women on the NRA membership roster).

Gun ownership is higher in those groups and locales where violence is lower. It is not the younger, poorer, single, urbanized individual who is more likely to own a gun. It is the older, richer, married person living in the country or a small town. The one attitudinal survey linking prejudice and gun-ownership, moreover, did so not based on a direct correlation but because racism was significantly related to a "tough-on-crime" stance, a stance marginally related to gun-ownership. A racism association has totally eluded other researchers.

It is the experience of other countries, Kleck maintains, that makes the case for American gun control. The figures are startling. Even in the 1970s, for instance, heavily gun-controlled England and Wales had a firearm homicide rate that was eighty-five times lower than ours. Kleck, however, points out that Great Britain also enjoys a far lower rate of nonfirearm violence. He also notes that the gun homicide rate among citizens of Japan, where civilian gun ownership is almost unknown, is about twice as high as among persons of Japanese descent living in America, where one can almost drive up and order a .38 to go with a side of fries.

Although he favors gun control, Kleck argues that polls, along with handgun-only hunting seasons, suggest that handguns are widely kept for legitimate sport. Not surprisingly therefore, of all the handguns sold annually, arguably, no more than 2 percent will ever be criminally employed.

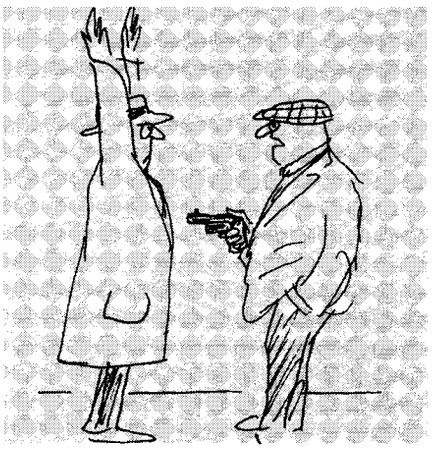
Kleck underscores, further, that over three-quarters of the households with handguns also stock rifles or shotguns. This, naturally, means many people would likely replace the side arm, if banished, with the available long arm. Such substitution, Kleck contends—in what's become a hot and yet cloudy academic debate—could well lead to increased fatalities since a rifle wound brings death more easily than a handgun wound.

Kleck, finally, presses for recognition of handguns (and long arms) as tools critical to civilians defending against crime. He is least convincing here. He cites some surveys to suggest the handgun is used defensively more often than offensively, that the handgun prevents victimization more often than it facilitates victimization. Such studies, though, hardly persuade, when, as Kleck admits, they turn on respondents' characterization of their own gun use. Further, one does not demonstrate civilian handiness with guns by simply challenging the cliché of the paperboy mistaken for the burglar.

At the same time, only the willfully naive can assume that millions of armed law-abiders have no gross crime-inhibiting effect. And as noted by distinguished control-proponent Franklin Zimring in *Scientific American* this fall, the disarming of civilians, amidst soaring crime rates, would be novel in the history of Western nations.

Such novelty might give pause to those Americans most vulnerable to crime. Both blacks and women, for instance, clearly favor at least moderate gun regulation. Kleck notes, though, that the black or female gun owner is more likely to keep the gun solely for self-defense, with the black owner four times more likely than average to keep his gun loaded.

Be warned that the above arguments, like all the others in *Point Blank*, grow up in the thick statistical underbrush. Study after study is cited (and very often faulted). The statisticians' lingo winds through almost every chapter. Still, writer Kleck substantially sticks to his introductory promise; the prose is largely "understandable to a general nonscholarly audience." More importantly, social science measurements, ultimately, must anchor so emotional a debate as gun control. Indeed Kleck falters when he gets too far ahead of the available data and concludes *Point Blank* with a chapter of policy recommendations. These include: a national background check to prevent sales to minors, felons, violent misdemeanants, repeat perpetrators of alcohol-related offenses, and historically violent patients released from mental institutions; more rigorous enforcement of state carry laws; discretionary sentence-enhancement for armed criminals; dealer licensing; and private transfer regulation.



"Relax—you wanna buy a gun?"

Unfortunately, the reader never knows whether these prescriptions represent prudent compromises in Kleck's position, for he never flatly proclaims the regulatory (or prohibitory) scenario he thinks ideal. Limiting himself to the currently feasible, he rather lets political consensus preempt personal conviction.

This mode of discourse, while not unprecedented, is nonetheless, ass-backwards. It's particularly misplaced in a controversy where one camp, the armed one, constantly warns of hidden agendas and slippery slopes. Finally, however, it is not how Kleck concludes but that he concludes at all which troubles most. Any major gun reform in our fortified country is bound to be a very big deal in conception, enactment, and enforcement. Given that Kleck locates methodological flaws or insufficient samplings in so many critical firearms studies, it's odd that he would offer any but the most tentative conclusions. Kleck has some very provocative and valuable perspectives on gun control. But the final word is not yet in anybody's sights. □

REVIEWERS

DON WYCLIFF *is editorial page editor of the* Chicago Tribune.

THOMAS SWICK, *travel editor of the* Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel, *is the author of* Unquiet Days: At Home in Poland, *recently published by Ticknor & Fields.*

LEE SIEGEL, *a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, is a free-lance writer living in New York City.*

KEVIN DOYLE, *a lawyer, works at the Alabama Capital Representation Resource Center in Birmingham, Alabama.*

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Matters historical & spiritual

Lawrence S. Cunningham

William M. Thompson has produced an impressive record of publication over the past decade or so ranging from a comprehensive Christology and a study of the saints as a *locus* for the doing of theology to a volume on Berulle and the French School for the Classics of Western Spirituality. In a sense, those early works were a seedbed from which this current volume springs.

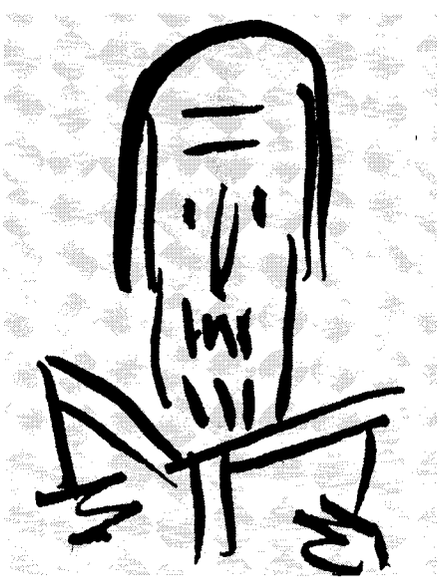
Thompson's work has a plot line that runs, roughly, like this: spirituality understood as reflection on Christian experience means that contemplation may be added to the theological discourses of narrative and conversation to produce a methodology which is "theomeditative" (the word is Thompson's). That new discourse is explicated against the background of the French School since it so strongly emphasized adoration as coming from contemplation. This method, Thompson thinks, not only helps us around the overworked dichotomies of high and low Christologies but also heals the supposed fractures between action and contemplation. Finally—and this is a central interest of Thompson—it helps us to integrate the witness of the saints and the role of Mary in spirituality in a new and, if you will pardon the expression, "postmodern" fashion.

Christology and Spirituality, *by William M. Thompson, Crossroad, $27.50, 240 pp.*

The above plot summary provides little hint of how rich and suggestive Thompson's book really is. While he may have attempted to do too much within the space of a single volume, what he does do most effectively is to show how a sophisticated theologian can absorb a strand of the spiritual tradition into the work of theology in a highly fruitful and sophisticated fashion. Thompson seems to attempt the reconstruction of a "style" of theology which was characteristic of the late Rahner, of von Balthasar, and of Barth; a theology, profoundly respectful of tradition, which has deep roots in adoration but which blossoms out in the air of the postmodern world. It is a theology that tries to avoid both the sterility of the academy and the enthusiasms of the merely pious.

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM *is professor of theology and chair of the department at the University of Notre Dame.*

Thompson's attempt to recover an older tradition of spirituality should win the applause of the English Jesuit (and editor of *The Way*) Philip Sheldrake. The latter's book is a careful plea for a more historically nuanced understanding of Christian spirituality. It is a very important contribution to the study of spirituality—a field which is, at the edges, littered with fads (what the hell is an enneagram?) and eccentricities.



Earlier attempts at historical accounts of the Christian spiritual experience assumed a single, socially and culturally uncontaminated spirituality (often cast in the elitist tones of monastic or religious life). This single spirituality ran, this view insisted, like a common thread through history. Not so, says Sheldrake. Every spiritual school, doctrine, or practice has its historical location and its cultural limitations. Attempts to reclaim a simple spirituality uncritically based, say, on the life of St. Francis, is to indulge in a kind of fundamentalist naiveté which does justice neither to Francis and his age nor to the needs of today.

Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method, *by Philip Sheldrake, Crossroad, $14.95, 238 pp.*

There is a further reason to pay attention to history. It can show us the side of the Christian life that was underrepresented or erased from our common memory. (It can also show us pathology, but Sheldrake does not overly insist on this.) Sheldrake gives two case studies to show how inadequate was the picture of a single kind of vowed religious life evolving from Pachomius in Egypt to Ignatius of Loyola. Such a model does justice neither to the early Syriac ascetics nor to such medieval lay movements like that of the Beguines which do not fit such a unitary picture of vowed religious life. Sheldrake's target, in short, would be those who would attempt to describe *The* Christian spirituality instead of Christian spiritualities.

These various spiritual paths evolve, not as individual searches for the One but as highly complex social impulses that attempt to make sense of historically conditioned life in the light of the gospel. This little book should be on the required reading list for any serious student of spirituality.

Joan Nuth's attempt to systematize the theological teaching of the great late-medieval mystic, Julian of Norwich, is the sort of historical work that Sheldrake had in mind but, I suspect, he would not find

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enough history in it. Nuth's thesis is that Julian was not simply a "spiritual writer" but a theologian of keen originality who, from her anchor hold in the medieval English city of Norwich, modified the Augustinian/Cistercian/Franciscan sources of her piety into an attractive theology which still speaks to us today.

Nuth is a close reader of Julian's writings and her reflections on Julian's theology are genuinely helpful. Her stated aim to systematize Julian's doctrinal teachings as they appear in the so-called long text (the second version of her work) of the *Showings* seems realized and, at least at that level, this is a genuine contribution to recovering the theology of this first woman theologian

Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich, *by Joan M. Nuth, Crossroad, $24.95, 217 pp.*

to write in English. Nuth, however, excluded any broad historical contextualization from her study (as she admits in her introduction) and that decision, it seems to me, weakens her book. Let me cite one obvious place where historical context would illumine Julian's work. She notes—as any reader of *Showings* knows—how visual Julian's descriptive prose is. Question: did that visual character of her prose derive, in part, from the art she saw in Norwich and its environs? Brant Pelphrey's 1989 study of Julian suggests as much without systematically following up just how it might have shaped her vision.

Both Pelphrey and Nuth, the former for cultural background, the latter for theology, are useful in approaching Julian's writings but neither is as good as the long introduction to the Colledge/Walsh edition of *Showings* (Paulist, 1978) which is still the best first approach to the brilliant Dame Julian. That edition gives us both introduction and the text; it is the place to start.

At the very end of her work Atkinson says—and rightly—that "motherhood" is never purely "natural." It is, rather, a construct shaped under religious, social, economic, and political pressures. This is surely true as any consideration of the different understandings of motherhood in our own culture show. "Motherhood" has often been used as a political metaphor to advance an ideological platform. We instinctively check our wallets when politicians invoke the word in public.

What interests Atkinson is motherhood as it was viewed in the medieval period when the reality of the church was an overwhelming factor in life. Her study, then, is focused on social history but is, simultaneously, deeply in debt to the historical character of theology. By using the concept of motherhood she is able to explore attitudes toward the body, sexuality, pain, family bonding, renunciation, and family vocation. Those attitudes are not rigid since medieval thinkers were forced to compose disparate attitudes into a coherent whole: how, for example, reconcile the vocation of maternity with asceticism? How account for the inescapable nexus between sexuality and childbearing? How did the Franciscan emphasis on the humanity of Christ impact on medieval attitudes toward children and their mothers? Did the late medieval emphasis on domesticity (reflected largely, but later, in the household of Martin and Katherina Luther and their rejection of monasticism) herald the rise of the bourgeois family as we know it today?

The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages, *by Clarissa Atkinson, Cornell University Press, $24.95, 274 pp.*

Atkinson takes up these and similar questions in this eminently readable and wide-ranging book. She has fine pages on the increasing importance of married saints (largely drawn from the aristocratic class), changing attitudes toward childbirth, and the spiritualizing of the language of maternity. There are some minor lapses (the Ravenna mosaics, at least the monumental apsidal ones, do not show, much less emphasize, the Virgin; not all the post-Gregorian reformers emphasized the distance between clerics and laity, etc.) but, in general, this is a very fine piece of work. It is a worthy successor to Atkinson's 1983 revisionist study of that English wife, mother, and pilgrim, Margery Kempe.

Finnegan's book is an updated version of a study which was first published in 1962. Her subject is a trio of thirteenth-century nuns—Gertrude the Great, Mechtild of Hackeborn, and Mechtild of Magdeburg—who lived in a Cistercian convent in medieval Saxony. Each was a noted spiritual writer, mystic, and director of souls. Their lives and writings take on looming importance today both because of the desire to recoup women's history in the church and also to be faithful to Sheldrake's insistence that we put the common history of spirituality into some kind of historical context.

The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics, *by Mary Jeremy Finnegan, O.P., The University of Georgia Press, $30, 171 pp.*

Finnegan takes up each person in turn, tells her story, and examines her writings both for their own content and in terms of probable influences. It is no surprise the Cistercian St. Bernard of Clairvaux as well as the Dominicans who had close ties to contemplative women in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are influential. That they all manifested a keen interest in the humanity of Christ and his passion is also explicable in terms of the post-Franciscan devotionalism of medieval culture. What may be most interesting is that their writings are so autobiographical in character that we get, as it were, a window on the religious experiences of medieval women in general and medieval cloistered life in particular. Mechtild of Magdeburg is, in some ways, most interesting of all because she had lived as a Beguine for forty years before entering the convent; her writings reflect both a lay and monastic formation as well as her acquaintance with the courtly love tradition. Finally, these women were mystics who were closely identified with the liturgical life of their convent; hence, their mystical writings were suffused with scriptural and liturgical echoes.

New translations of the writings of these women now appear as well as articles about their spiritual doctrine. The reprinting of

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Finnegan's book (despite the updating it still shows its age a bit) is a sign of this renaissance. One can only hope that sooner or later we get a volume (or volumes) on the Helfta mystics in the "Classics of Western Spirituality" to make their lives and doctrines even more accessible in inexpensive volumes for students of spirituality.

The Making of a Saint: The Life, Times, and Sactification of Neophytos the Recluse, *by Catia Galatariotou, Cambridge University Press, $64.50, 310 pp.*

At the offset let me stipulate that *The Making of a Saint* is a terribly recondite, frightfully expensive, and earnestly scholarly work on a medieval Cypriot hermit. Its appeal (it is a rewritten doctoral dissertation) is going to be to professional Byzantinists and lovers of things Orthodox. With all those cautionary words in mind (after all, this is not a scholarly column and readers should be forewarned!) let me say that I found this book to be wonderfully interesting if only because of its basic thesis, namely, that a medieval recluse named Neophytos set out to become a canonized saint in his own lifetime and, as it were, constructed his life in such a fashion that it not only conformed to the patterns of traditional hagiography but managed to get himself to be the object of a liturgical cult (and the subject of icons) before his death.

What makes its possible for Galatariotou to prove that Neophytos set out to do this is that he wrote voluminously during his lifetime (an appendix listing his work runs to nearly twenty pages) and, from those writings, one can reconstruct both what he took the ideal of sanctity to be and how, in the process, he shaped himself according to that ideal. Neophytos went further: he composed a liturgy in his own honor (to commemorate a miracle worked in his behalf) and got that liturgy entered into the monastic liturgical calendar for annual celebration. In effect, Neophytos canonized himself!

This would be only the story of an ascetic megalomaniac if it were not for the fact the author has a larger story she wants to tell. At the heart of her book is this question: how is a saint recognized as a saint in a particular age and, further, how does that saint function in a given culture and what does that life say about the culture within which it found itself? Galatariotou's exhaustive (and exhausting!) detailing of medieval Cypriot culture gives her the confidence to answer those questions. The real merit of her work for this nonspecialist is to see how that question may be asked and how an answer might be pursued. For that reason, her research deserves notice beyond the smaller academic coterie who have interests similar to her own. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

Wilkinson. When seen as the end rather than a means, they cannot be evaluated and compared. To suggest alternative methods is said to be an attack on "education" and "the children" in this view.

The truth is simply this, as logic and experience show: education is the goal; there are many alternative vehicles for achieving it; only by historical accident have we moved to a finance monopoly; analyses and other nations show monopoly can be avoided; all of American education would be better off if monopoly were ended.

As to "whatever happened to us," well, there is little secret there. The self-sacrifice of generations of Catholic religious gave American Catholics their own system of educational choice. Those nuns eliminated most of the financial penalty for having our own system. Those days are gone. What should always have been—parental freedom via vouchers—must now be for Catholics and for all.

QUENTIN L. QUADE

This topic is discussed further in "An Editor's Notebook," page 4.

Maura-san as model

Hammond, N.Y.

To the Editors: I confess I was angered by the letter from Kay Siemssen Batts [Correspondence, April 24] responding to Ruth O'Halloran's article on the enlightenment of her daughter [February 28]. Ms. Batts displayed both ignorance and insensitivity in her comments.

First she was insensitive to the plight of Mrs. O'Halloran, who obviously is disturbed by what she called her daughter's "defection." I do not consider Maura's embracing of Buddhism to be a defection at all, but simply the culmination of all that her earlier Catholic education had prepared her for. She was following the path of Meister Eckhart and the medieval mystics.

Ms. Batts displayed a distressing ignorance of Zen. Zen Buddhism is not a cult and the Zen master is not a cult leader. As a devoted Zen practitioner for ten years, as an active member of Rochester and Montreal Zen centers, and having struggled with the koan *mu* myself for a very long time, I found Ms. Batts's references to Zen so uninformed as to be offensive.

Right now I am engaged in reading the journal of Maura-san and find it more inspiring than any spiritual book I have encountered in a long time. Ms. Batts says she would never hold up Maura as a role

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model. Indeed, she is *not* a role model for young women in middle-class Catholic suburbia. I am sure she would never have wanted to be.

Mrs. O'Halloran's story of her daughter's enlightenment was one of the finest things *Commonweal* has printed. And I humbly acknowledge Maura-san to be a true role model for this old, retired Catholic priest. (MSGR.) JOSEPH G. BAILEY

Aid for a broken church

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Your coverage of developments in Central and Eastern Europe encourages me to call your readers' attention to efforts being made by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) to assist in the restoration of the church's pastoral ministry in the countries of the region.

From firsthand observation, I can report that, while there are differences from country to country, the church is very much alive in Central and Eastern Europe. Churches are reopening, seminaries and convents are filled with candidates, religious materials are eagerly read, and children are being taught the faith. The church has credibility with the people because under repressive regimes it was an instrument in the struggle for liberty, democracy, and human rights. Now that laws prohibiting religious practice have been changed, many people expect the church to play a key role in the development of their nations and the continued growth of democracy.

Yet there are great obstacles. All manner of Catholic institutions and structures were all but destroyed in the decades of state atheism. Clergy are few, and materials—books, copying machines, tape recorders, even clothes—are scarce. Former Communist party members are still in administrative positions through which they can and do obstruct church initiatives.

Because of these problems and opportunities, the U.S. Catholic bishops have established the Office to Aid the Catholic Church in Central and Eastern Europe and have authorized a national collection for a three-year period to provide funds. Aims of the program include formation and training of priests and religious; development of catechetical programs, materials, and teachers; mass media and communications; and restoration of the church's charitable works.

Money is a very important help. In Central and Eastern Europe, American dollars can make many resources available. I urge your readers to support the national collection, which will continue next year. After money, professional and technical experts are needed—people with skills who can volunteer some of their time to share their expertise in these countries. Teachers of every sort are needed—in theology, philosophy, sociology, social work, history, economics, English as a second language. Consultants in management, bookkeeping, computer literacy, organizational development can be immensely useful.

People in these countries also need continuing moral support from ethnic groups in the U.S. for their countrymen. Church leaders want information on ways to organize, ways to develop pastoral ministry in the post-Vatican II church, ways to enlist and inspire the laity. For our part, we need to learn from their faith in the midst of suffering and oppression. As our sisters and brothers begin to experience the joys and challenges of freedom, we have an opportunity to learn, and to help.

(REV.) GEORGE SARAUSKAS

The writer is executive director of the Office to Aid the Catholic Church in Central and Eastern Europe, 3211 Fourth Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017.

Leading voters astray

Hempstead, N.Y.

To the Editors: As I am quoted in Murray Polner's fine article, "The Threat of Peace" [May 8], allow me to note that the decline of manufacturing to which I alluded has serious bearing on the cultural-political split that David R. Carlin, Jr., writing in the same issue ["Blame the Messenger"], seeks to blame for Democratic failure to elect a president.

The decline has largely eliminated the middle-skill jobs that once provided a continuum between low and high incomes and educational levels. The effect, in terms of lost jobs of working people everywhere, was terrible, engulfing not only the white Southerners and ethnic Catholics that concern Carlin, but black men and others as well. It is a major reason for the widening gulf and conflict between what Carlin calls "the old groups [who] are working class and lower-middle class [and] the new [who are] upper-middle."

Rather than considering this decline and other changes in the crucial task of making a living, Carlin tries to establish a socio-political dichotomy that effectively cuts our society in two. But his argument comes across mainly as an ill-tempered roundup of Spiro Agnew's "usual suspects." There is, for example, not "a certain amount of racism," but quite a lot and it now flows in all directions and permeates much of American life. Upward mobility, Catholic and otherwise, which he cites, tends to lead to more secularism, another of his menaces, as many socio-economic studies of religious commitment indicate. A "sense of community" and being "highly individualistic" are most emphatically not antithetical, and one person's "moral absolutism" is another's "moral relativism." Most deplorable is Carlin's contrast of "old groups [of] locals rooted in a place" with the bad new ones of "rootless cosmopolitans"—a term both wrong and offensive in a country constantly on the move, where we are all citizens of the whole country rather than bound to some part of its soil.

Mr. Carlin is doing no favors for the constituencies whose cause he attempts to espouse. Rather, he might inquire why, instead of accepting traditional alliances and at least tolerating cultural differences, the groups whose disaffection with the Democrats he describes should instead vote for another party that wrecks their industries, busts their unions, blocks a proper health-care system for them, robs their children of meaningful job prospects and a viable environment, and does not even offer decent unemployment insurance unless kicked by a Democratic Congress. What Carlin describes is no assertion of populist wisdom; it is nothing more than the old politics of making people consent to being hurt, provided objects of their hatred are hurt worse. It is further proof that you can fool some of the people all the time, and if you can do it to 51 percent of them, you get elected. JOHN E. ULLMANN

The writer is professor of management at Hofstra University.

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Praying the Stations

Lake Forest, Ill.

To the Editors: John Deedy's reactions [Correspondence, April 24] to our report on the Stations of the Cross in Jerusalem today [March 27]—his idea that this perpetuates a myth, and his singling out certain stations that are no longer recognized as valid—deserve consideration.

Still, these fourteen stations are the ones honored in Jerusalem every Good Friday and other Fridays by diverse groups of people from all over the world. The Stations seen in *Commonweal* are unusual in that they give a reportorial account of this commemoration as practiced today. They are not Bible illustrations; "it is faith that dominates here, not archaeology."

Executed in ceramic tile, these Stations are now permanently affixed in St. Patrick's Church in Lake Forest. IRENE McMAHON

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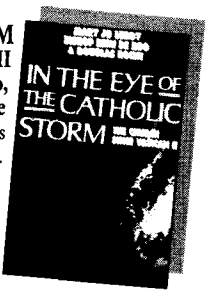

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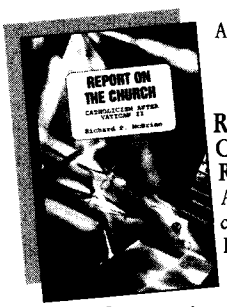

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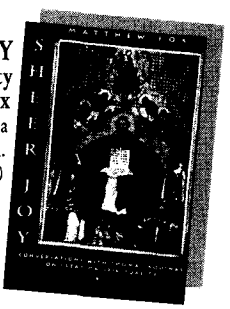

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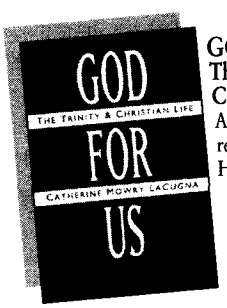

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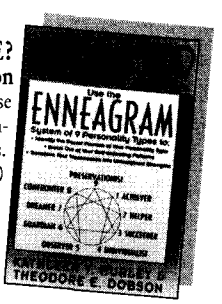

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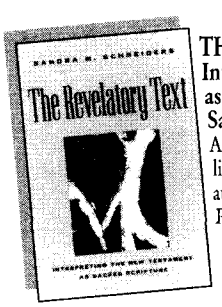

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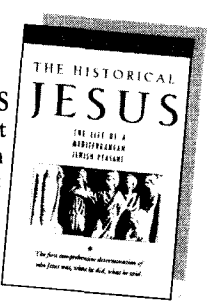

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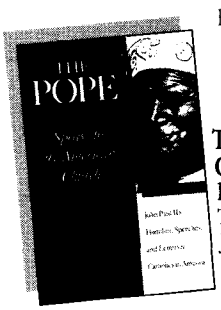

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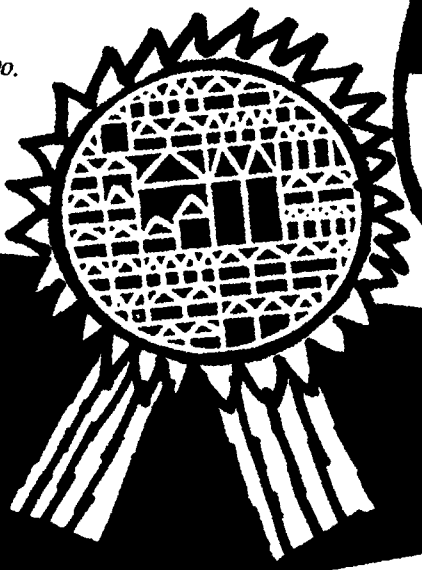

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